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CELEBRATING THE WONDER OF WATER

Science labels the stuff \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \). It’s so common we hardly pay attention to it—until it loses its balance: raging floods, searing drought, stifling humidity, paralyzing blizzards.

Reflecting the light of a setting sun or flowing gently through a mountain meadow, water gives us great delight. Seldom, however, do we consider the unseen properties of water that make it the one thing that gives the earth its uniqueness among all the other planets in our solar system—and even the newly discovered planets farther out in space.

In this booklet, RBC writer Dean Ohlman urges us to contemplate at a far deeper level the significance of water to the human body—and to the soul.

Martin R. De Haan II

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WATER AND THE WONDER

The canyon that cradles the Big Thompson River in the mountains of Colorado offers the traveler such sensory delights that it’s not easy to forget. I’ve made the memorable journey between Estes Park and Loveland many times—sometimes stopping and getting out of the car to enjoy the music of the water and to dip my feet in the refreshing but painful chill of the snow-born stream. Surrounded by high rock walls and lined with willows and alders, the Big Thompson makes its way for about 15 miles rapidly downhill from Estes Park. It flows through a multitude of twists and turns over and around boulders that have been rounded smooth by centuries of hydraulic sculpting.

The size and abundance of these rocks, however, reveal a fearful truth about this normally confined river. Whenever longtime residents of this narrow canyon hear the drumming of distant thunder, a gut-tensing reflex reminds them that the Big Thompson Canyon is one of Colorado’s most likely spots for a destructive flash flood.

The most deadly of the canyon’s floods happened on July 31, 1976, when a rare combination of weather factors created a towering stationary thunderstorm that dropped 8 inches of rain in just 1 hour. Because of the narrowness of the canyon and the steepness of its rocky sides, the overabundance of water had nowhere to go but into the shallow river channel. The huge wall of water that resulted moved so fast that many in its path had no time to scramble to safety.
One hundred and forty people died in the rampaging waters.

Whether in their calm or chaotic state, the properties and power of water fill us with respect and awe.

Whether in their calm or chaotic state, the properties and power of water fill us with respect and awe for something as gentle as a summer morning mist, as hard and cold as ice, or as irresistible as a pounding surf. In the many faces of water we see a reflection not only of our own existence but of something far bigger than life itself.

WATER AND OUR WORLD

THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER

The earth is the only planet we know of where water and life walk hand in hand. The way the earth uses water is so fine-tuned that just one factor out of kilter would destroy the very life that water sustains. Simply put, virtually everything alive on earth has its source in water and lives in some form of water. Marine creatures and plants live in and depend upon liquid water and are composed primarily of water. Terrestrial creatures and plants live in and depend upon gaseous water (water vapor) and they too are composed mostly of water. And people who live in the humid tropics sometimes find it hard to believe they aren’t living in liquid water!
Since we are virtually surrounded by water, it seems ironic that we would feel discomfort with high humidity—especially given that our bodies are mostly water. A human baby is 75 percent water, an adult male is 65 percent water, and an adult female is composed of 60 percent water.

When we age, however, we tend to “dry out.” The older members of our families are about 50 percent water. This fact gives rise to the theory that people might live longer and remain healthier by drinking more water. It seems reasonable—given what water does for our bodies. Water is the very stuff of our cells. Of the 11 gallons of water in the average adult body, about 6½ gallons are what make up the fluid in our cells: intracellular water. The remainder of the fluid, which is extracellular, is used to lubricate and operate functions like blood flow, digestion, metabolism, procreation, and muscle and bone movement. Water also provides the body with the temperature control critical to maintaining its life-giving and life-sustaining processes. And water even helps us to think: Our brains are 75 percent water. Knowing this, we can readily understand that while we can live more than a month without food, we can’t live more than a week without water.
we can’t live more than a week without water.

Unless we were highly motivated in chemistry class, it’s not likely that most of us remember the chemical formula for many of the common compounds and materials we interact with from day to day. But most of us remember the formula for water: H₂O. And we may even remember that the formula means that water is a compound formed from two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen.

Hydrogen and oxygen are two of the Creator’s basic material building blocks. Science calls them “elements.” And hydrogen is the most basic. It’s listed #1 on that complex chart of elements many of us came to dread: the Periodic Table. Those who named these elements actually did a pretty good job of it. Take hydrogen, for example. It’s made up of two Greek terms that mean “water” and “born.” By giving it that name, scientists were making it clear that this substance is what gives birth to water. That’s pretty significant when you understand how water, birth, and life are related. And it’s interesting also to learn that hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe, making up 90 percent of its weight.

But hydrogen doesn’t particularly like being alone, so it teams up with a number of other elements to make some really significant compounds—the most important to life being its bond with oxygen. This bond happens because hydrogen atoms have a positive electrical charge and oxygen has a negative charge. They’re like magnets attracting each other. In nanoseconds these little teams join up with one
another to form vapor and drops, then eventually clouds, thunderstorms, puddles, lakes, and streams—and finally our great oceans.

It's been discovered also that this chemical bond isn't unique to the earth. Water is actually common all over God's cosmos (which isn't surprising when you learn how widespread both hydrogen and oxygen are). There's a cloud of gases in the constellation Orion that's making water vapor so fast—and so vast—that it puts out enough water molecules to fill the earth's oceans more than twice every hour!

**THE PROPERTIES OF WATER**

To better understand what a wonder water is, it's helpful to consider the amazing properties of water. These properties are so unusual that the finding of many scientists is the rather unscientific conclusion that water is simply “weird.” Students of this amazing substance have actually listed 38 anomalies of water—ways that water differs from what's expected. And it's these differences that make water so significant.

**Density.** The almost universal behavior for liquids is that when they get cooler, they become more dense, until their molecules virtually stand still. They freeze in their most dense state. Not water. What happens with water is that while it does get denser as it gets colder, when it reaches about 38° F the process stops. And when the temperature drops just six more degrees, it quickly expands and then freezes. That's why ice floats. And it's a good thing. If it didn't do this, ice would form on the bottom of bodies of

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water—gradually building up until all life in the water was destroyed. This would in turn eventually destroy all life on earth. It's this same process that helps create the wonders that fascinate us every winter: the latticework of frost, the symmetry of snowflakes, and the light blanket of white that dazzles our eyes on cold sunny days.

The 19th-century preacher and author George MacDonald, who became the inspiration for many of C. S. Lewis' writings, was fascinated by nature—and by water in particular. He wrote the following reflection on ice crystals:

I walked home one winter's Sunday morning after church. It was a lovely day. The sun shone so warm that you could not help thinking of what God would be able to do before long—draw primroses and buttercups out of the earth by force of sweet persuasive influences. But in the shadows lay fine webs of laces of ice, so delicately lovely that one could not but be glad of the cold that made the water able to please itself by taking such graceful forms. And I wondered over again, for the hundredth time, what could be the principle which, in the wildest, most lawless, fantastically chaotic, apparently capricious, work of nature, always kept it beautiful. The beauty of holiness must be at the heart of it somehow, I thought. Because our God is so free from stain, so loving, so unselfish, so good, so altogether what He wants us to be, so holy, therefore all His works declare Him in beauty; His fingers can touch
nothing but to mold it into loveliness; and even the play of His elements is in grace and tenderness of form (Discovering The Character Of God, edited by Michael Phillips, Bethany House, 1989, pp.117-118).

**Cohesion.** The way the water molecule is formed and the nature of the elements from which it’s made result in creating a liquid with a surface “skin.” It’s this skin that dimples under the feet of the fascinating spider-like water strider, spreads its widening wake behind the zooming little water-boatman beetle, and forms the concentric circles advancing outward from the impact point of a child-thrown stone. Even a sewing needle can be made to float on the cohesive surface of water. This cohesion, or surface tension, also makes water form the droplets so vital to other life processes—especially important to the form and function of the living cell.

**Adhesion.** While cohesion causes water molecules to stick together, adhesion helps water stick to other things. We experience this when we try to separate stacked glass tumblers that have virtually bonded themselves with a thin layer of water. It takes an amazing amount of pull to accomplish the task. Many a mom has scars to indicate that some of these attempts have negative consequences!

It’s this same adhesive force that creates capillarity: the ability of water to climb narrow tubes. Cohesion and adhesion in tandem make water molecules sort of reach up and grab the sides of a tube, and seemingly in defiance of gravity, pull
themselves upward, while at the same time they reach down and grab fellow molecules and pull them along. It’s this property that allows water to move up through living plants and move the way blood moves through the capillaries of our bodies.

**Temperature Control.** Water is the earth’s thermostat and the human body’s thermal regulator. What it does in relationship to heat is astounding in many ways. The key wonder is that given the behavior of other similar substances, water would be expected to become a gas at room temperature. Life exists because it doesn’t. Some water, however, does escape the surface of its liquid state and become vapor through the process of e-vapor-ation. Evaporation cools the surface area where it occurs. How it does this is itself a wonder: Heat applied to the surface of water causes the top molecules to “dance” with the higher temperature—like barefoot kids trying to cross a hot asphalt road on a summer day. Eventually these heat-energized molecules vaporize, rising like hot air balloons. This leaves behind the cooler molecules, lowering the temperature of the body from which it has escaped.

Water also stores heat extremely well and gives it up reluctantly. Those of us who live in the Great Lakes region of the United States are well aware of the result of this factor in the winter: “lake-effect” snow. Water vapor rises from the surface of the heat-retaining large lakes and condenses into snowflakes in the drier subfreezing air. Prevailing winds move the subsequent snow clouds over land.
where they drop their crystal load—sometimes all within a few short miles. Longtime residents of Buffalo, New York, can testify of the “vertical blizzards” that have many times left them struggling through chest-high snow to reach the curbside white mounds that mark the spot where they need to start digging for their cars.

Water’s ability to store heat and then hold it is just one more way that it supports life on earth. If it didn’t make up nearly 80 percent of the earth’s surface and didn’t store heat, the earth’s temperature fluctuation would become so extreme that all life would quickly cease to exist.

**Dissolver.** Water is called the universal solvent. Virtually all the naturally occurring elements have been found dissolved in water, from sodium to gold. And it’s clearly no accident that the most common elements in water are the most common elements in the human body. Of all the work that water does in, around, and for people, one of its most important jobs is its capacity to carry to every human cell the dissolved nutrients and critical components we need to live and remain healthy.

**THE AVAILABILITY OF WATER**

The millions of people who live along the coastlines or occupy the water-rich regions of the earth sometimes find it difficult to believe that millions of others struggle to find enough water to survive. It seems that the earth is oversupplied with water—until we understand some significant facts.

The most basic fact is that 96.3 percent of the
earth’s water is found in its oceans. While seawater is critical in many ways to life everywhere, it’s too salty for people to use for drinking, for irrigation, and for most industrial purposes. Fresh water, then, amounts to only 3.7 percent of the world’s supply. That’s actually a pretty hefty amount of water, and if all of it were available for direct human use, it would more than supply all our fresh-water needs. But most of it is not available. The great bulk of it is locked up in glaciers, ice caps, the atmosphere, and in ground moisture. The amount available to human beings from wells, streams, and lakes is .007 percent of the global water supply!

To get a good picture of this, imagine that all the earth’s water is collected in a thirty-gallon drum. Now fill a gallon-size container from the drum. That represents all the fresh water there is on earth. Finally, pick up a teaspoon and dispense from the gallon container enough water to almost fill it. That’s all we have available for ready use. But, believe it or not, even that small amount can adequately provide humanity with all its fresh-water needs—that is if we don’t pollute it, don’t overexploit it, and don’t hoard it. We also need to keep in mind that the other air-breathing creatures of the world, also loved and cared for by their Creator, need their share of fresh water—a fact poetically presented to us by the biblical psalmist:

He sends the springs into the valleys; they flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their...
home; they sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works (Ps. 104:10-13).

If all the earth's fresh water were neatly portioned out to human beings, we'd each have about 2 million gallons of the vital stuff. And over a normal span of life, we would take in and use only about 16,000 gallons of water. The amount ideally available to us and the amount we consume to keep our bodies working seems to indicate that we have a lot to spare—until we start adding up the hidden spending of \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \) by the modern human.

Consider these common water usages in the life of the typical American:

- 2 gallons to brush one's teeth each day
- 4 gallons to flush a toilet once
- 12 gallons to put dishes through an automatic washer
- 20 gallons to hand-wash dishes
- 30 gallons to take a shower
- 2,000 gallons to make four new tires
- 37,000 gallons to make a car
- 1 gallon to process a hamburger
- 11 gallons to process a chicken
- 9 gallons to process a can of fruit or vegetables
- 5 gallons to make one board-foot of lumber
- 24 gallons to make a pound of plastic
- 1,800 gallons to refine one barrel of oil

When people have to pay for water to be delivered, it really adds up. For example, a citizen of water-rich Canada pays about a penny for 8 gallons of water. In the Old World
nations like Germany, a citizen pays about a penny for every gallon. Developed nations typically deliver water through municipal waterworks, requiring far less effort for their citizens than those who have to hand-carry water. The result of this difference is that the poorer citizens in less developed nations will end up paying 12 times more in actual currency for water—and who knows how much more in labor.

Inequities like this, of course, are not the result of deliberate hoarding. They merely reflect the reality of the irregular distribution of fresh-water supplies around the world. For example, the Great Lakes, which are shared by the United States and Canada, contain almost 20 percent of the world’s fresh water. Lake Baikal in Russia holds close to the same. This means that 40 percent of the earth’s available fresh water lies in confined areas within the political boundaries of just three nations. One illustration will help us understand the scope of this amount of water: If mainland United States were totally flat and the Great Lakes were allowed to flow evenly over its surface, every American would be struggling to stay afloat in 9½ feet of water!

THE CARE OF WATER

The irregular geographical distribution of fresh water is the prime cause of both apparent and real inequities in human access to it. But other factors are also important in the growing international water crisis—most of them the result of human behavior. Consider these factors that compound the problem of uneven fresh-water distribution:
Population Increase. The number of people on the earth 2,000 years ago was only 3 percent of the total living today. Yet there is no more fresh water available today than there was then. Global water use has increased six times in the past 70 years, while the population increased only three times. This means that not only are there many more people using water, they are also individually using—directly and indirectly—more water in their daily lives. If people consume water in 2025 at the rate now enjoyed by residents of developed nations, 90 percent of all fresh water will be used up in 2025. Unless Lake Baikal, the Great Lakes, and other beautiful and cherished bodies of water become nothing more than reservoirs of water for human consumption, this means a severe water shortage is looming for many people around the world. In addition, as we use more and more available fresh water for human purposes, less remains to maintain river, lake, and wetland habitats vital to the health and survival of both people and wildlife.

It's estimated that 1.2 billion people, or almost 1 of every 5 people in the world, are without access to safe drinking water, and half of the world's population lacks adequate water purification systems. Add to this the fact that 2.4 billion people, or 40 percent of the world's population, do not have access to adequate sanitation. The sad result is that some 2.3 billion people in the world suffer from water-related diseases, and millions of them die each year. In Bangladesh, for instance, three quarters of all
diseases are related to unsafe water. Sixty percent of infant mortality in the world is related to inadequate water quality and quantity.

It’s estimated that 1.2 billion people, or almost 1 of every 5 people in the world, are without access to safe drinking water.

Water Quality Decline. Population growth and increased consumption not only create shortages, they also degrade the quality of the water that is available. The world's fresh-water supply is being contaminated by substances that eventually make it life-threatening rather than life-giving.

Pollution is caused by both deliberate and accidental dumping of sewage into the world's waterways. Chemicals from industry, agriculture, and human households are continuing to find their way into our fresh-water supplies— in spite of increased educational endeavors and governmental controls. Further, hormone- and antibiotic-laced animal and human waste is also finding its way into our fresh-water supplies. Scientific studies are beginning to provide evidence that these are creating potentially devastating effects on both human and animal immune, endocrine, and reproductive systems. Many researchers are convinced that the early onset of puberty in girls in the more affluent nations is the result of hormones found in both our food and our water.

As the world’s
population increases, the demand for food rises. This in turn requires more intensive agricultural production. Agricultural irrigation is responsible for 70 percent of the total water used globally. Agricultural waste, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and silt are poisoning and choking huge river systems. The pumping of water for agriculture is drastically reducing the water levels in most of the world’s underground water reservoirs (called aquifers). When the fresh water in an aquifer near the ocean is pumped out, it is often refilled by saline water from the sea—salt water that is useless for farming and human consumption.

Even dams, which were once thought to be the answer to the world’s fresh-water shortages, are now shown to be a cause of water degradation. Unlike rainwater, which is purified by natural distillation, water held behind dams is usually more saline—eventually degrading the soil upon which it is applied. The soil in vast regions of Iraq and even in the still agriculturally productive desert regions of the American Southwest is becoming so salty that little will grow there. Whitish crusty soil loaded with salt often glitters in the sunlight next to crops that grow only because they’re pampered by intensive, expensive, and increasingly futile farming methods.

Because fresh water is consumed by a rapidly growing world population, numerous small and large rivers no longer even reach the sea. And many of those that do are polluted. The inevitable result is the serious degradation of coastal ocean waters, killing off coral reefs.
and destroying other marine habitats important for the production of fish and other sea foods needed to feed so many of the world’s people.

One thing is made clear by this growing fresh-water crisis: We must do more than just consume water; we must become its caretakers as well. The life, health, and well-being of billions of people around the globe increasingly depend on our understanding and careful management of the world’s fresh water.

Offering a cup of water to a thirsting individual as an expression of obedience to love our neighbor has become more than just a symbol. It also reflects the sobering reality that the world’s fresh-water resources are being threatened. So the Christlike act of neighborly love will increasingly involve protecting access to this life-critical substance for all people.

Seventy percent of the water drawn from the world’s rivers, lakes, and underground aquifers is used for agricultural irrigation. And almost half of that water is lost to evaporation and spilling before it reaches the roots of thirsty plants. So the single most significant water stewardship practice would be to develop and implement more efficient...
irrigation practices. Drip irrigation, which was pioneered by Israeli agricultural scientists and farmers, has evolved into a wider variety of low-waste watering methods worldwide now called “micro irrigation.” These methods typically result in cutting water use in half. It’s clear that wide acceptance and implementation of such practices would be wise water management.

There are a number of other important macro-conservation efforts that would significantly reduce water consumption:

**Recycling Of Urban Wastewater.** Mexico City, for instance, uses urban wastewater to irrigate and fertilize alfalfa fields. Arcata, California, and many other cities in the US, are now incorporating wastewater treatment with wetland development to purify water, irrigate crops, and increase wildlife habitat. Thousands of municipalities now require new buildings with paved parking lots to provide water-catchment basins that will allow rainwater to seep back through the ground into the local aquifer instead of being flushed into streams and out of town via expensive storm drains.

**Recycling And Conservation Of Industrial Wastewater.** It typically requires 300 tons of water to make a ton of steel. This shows the magnitude of industrial water use. Yet in the US from 1950 to 1990, water use by industry has fallen one-third while industrial output has risen four times. This is a strong indicator that the message about water conservation is finally being heeded. The more developed nations, however, at present have more resources and more resolve
than the less developed nations to incorporate good principles of water management. Western European countries, for example, use half as much water to produce a ton of paper as China does, which consumes nearly 119,000 gallons of water per ton of paper.

**Landscaping To Match Natural Local Vegetation.** Standards for what makes landscaping beautiful are changing rapidly in response to the fresh-water crisis in many countries. Cities and citizens in arid locations used to strive to “green up” lawns, parks, and boulevard medians by pumping copious amounts of water onto the landscape—sometimes merely as a symbol of affluence. Many now recognize how wasteful it is to endeavor to create a rainforest in a desert climate. They’ve gone from “green and lush is beautiful” to “prickly and sparse is beautiful.” Many of the cities in America’s desert Southwest now seek to landscape both public and private property with native, drought-resistant plants. This simple attitude change—compelled by rising water costs and water shortages—has resulted in a dramatic reduction of water use.

If these macro-conservation practices by institutions are added to micro-conservation practices by individuals, the benefits of water management will become more and more apparent to all. Some of these personal practices might include the following:

- installing low-flow toilets or toilets that compost waste rather than transport it to water-treatment plants
- installing low-flow shower heads
- repairing water leaks
• not letting the water run continuously when brushing teeth
• washing clothes less frequently, and then only in full washer loads
• using dishwashers only when they are full, and running them on the short cycle
• not letting the water run when washing dishes by hand
• keeping chilled drinking water in the refrigerator instead of running the tap until the water is cold
• composting waste food instead of putting it through a disposal
• washing your car from a bucket and running the hose only to rinse
• sweeping walks and driveways instead of spraying them clean with water
• watering lawns and landscaping early in the morning or in the evening (which is better for the plants, anyway)
• using “gray water” from tubs, showers, sinks, and washers to water plants
• collecting and using rainwater to water plants
• reconsidering the “necessity” of swimming pools in arid climates
• returning large irrigated lawn areas to naturally watered vegetation

These are just a few of the many personal efforts to conserve water that might be considered as practical ways to “love your neighbor as yourself.” If we do sense the wonder of water, we are likely also to be reminded of the One who not only created our world but placed it under our care (Gen. 2:4-15).
Given the importance of water to all of life’s processes, it’s not surprising to discover how often water, water imagery, and water symbolism appear in the Bible. What surprises many, however, is the depth of understanding about the physical nature of water demonstrated by writers of the Scriptures over 2,000 years ago. It’s commonly believed that many of the processes, like the water cycle, were not understood until the dramatic increase in scientific knowledge beginning with the Renaissance. But some of the oldest books of the Bible indicate that knowledge about the life-supporting attributes of water has been around since ancient times.

Here are some of those processes mentioned at least 1,000 years before the time of Christ:

**Ecological Relationships.** “Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh? Can the reeds flourish without water? While it is yet green and not cut down, it withers before any other plant” (Job 8:11-12).

**Erosion And Dissolution.** “As water wears away stones, and as torrents wash away the soil of the earth . . .” (Job 14:19).
Significance To Regeneration Of Plants. “For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease. Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant” (Job 14:7-9).

Clouds As Water Vapor. “He binds up the water in His thick clouds, yet the clouds are not broken under it” (Job 26:8). “With moisture He saturates the thick clouds; He scatters His bright clouds” (Job 37:11). “He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries” (Ps. 135:7).

Evaporation And Condensation. “He draws up drops of water, which distill as rain from the mist, which the clouds drop down and pour abundantly on man” (Job 36:27-28).

Water Cycle. “All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again” (Eccl. 1:7).

Because so many of us today live and work in places insulated and isolated from the outdoors, we tend to ignore the water-related processes going on around us, unless we are caught off guard by a sudden storm, a flash flood, or a raging blizzard. The ancients, on the other hand, had an intimacy with the natural world that compelled them to have great respect for the power the Creator demonstrated by the dynamics of water. Consider this set of questions from the book of Job intended to emphasize...
God’s control over nature:
Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water, or a path for the thunderbolt, to cause it to rain on a land where there is no one, a wilderness in which there is no man; to satisfy the desolate waste, and cause to spring forth the growth of tender grass? Has the rain a father? Or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb comes the ice? And the frost of heaven, who gives it birth? The waters harden like stone, and the surface of the deep is frozen (Job 38:25-30).

AS THE SOURCE AND NURTURER OF LIFE
No doubt the most significant reference to water in the Bible—perhaps in all of human literature—is found in the Genesis account of creation. That’s where we find the foundational statement about the connection of life to water:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:1-2).

The word deep in the second verse is a Hebrew term that also refers to water—the fathomless depths of the oceans. This image of the protecting Spirit of God brooding over the pregnant waters of earth as the Creator gave origin to all of life is paralleled by the development of the life of every human being born on that very same earth. The hovering Holy Spirit guided the development of life on the earth just as lovingly as He does.
every human soul nurtured in the placental waters of its mother.

Certainly Francis of Assisi had this image of nurture in mind when he wrote, “Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and keeps us.” People of God’s Book shouldn’t feel pressured to discard this beautiful picture of the primal earth as a nurturing mother. Rather, we ought to boldly proclaim that our Father God through the eternal wisdom and power of God the Son and the superintendence of God the Holy Spirit created the earth with the capacity to nourish all life it gives birth to. Such life could not exist without the miracle of water.

The root meaning of the Latin word for “nourish” is “to give milk to.” From this we can see that St. Francis’ metaphor “Mother Earth” is not based on a pantheistic understanding, but on natural reality. As a follower of Christ, he properly gave praise to his Lord and God, as did the psalmist:

>Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created. He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away (Ps. 148:1-6).

The human embryo, over the course of 9 months, grows into a mature infant as it “swims” in its placental water sac. This fact provides us the...
simplest and most likely explanation for Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:5-6). People are first born naturally—out of water. And those who place their faith in Jesus Christ are born a “second time”—born of the Spirit.

AS SEEN IN THE BIBLICAL MIRACLES

Since water is so important in the Middle East, it’s not surprising to discover how often water is a primary factor in many of the miracles of the Bible.

- The creation of life (Gen. 1)
- The flood (Gen. 6–9)
- The preservation of the infant Moses (Ex. 2)
- The plagues against Egypt (Ex. 7–10)
- The dividing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14)
- Water from the rock (Ex. 17)
- The dividing of the Jordan (Josh. 3)
- Elijah and the drought (1 Ki. 17–18)
- The consumption of Elijah’s water-drenched altar (1 Ki. 18)
- Elisha and the floating ax head (2 Ki. 6)
- Jesus turning water to wine (Jn. 2)
- The great catches of fish (Lk. 5; Jn. 21)
- Jesus walking on the water (Mt. 14)
- Jesus calming the storm (Mk. 4)

God used most of these miracles in the life of Israel chiefly as evidence of His presence and His power to a people surrounded by cultures serving powerless false gods. But the Bible makes it clear that even the regular events of nature have a miraculous element.
Is God’s sending forth water from the rock at Moses’ command any more awe-inspiring than the water He’s poured forth for millennia from the foot of Mount Hermon to fill the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan, and the Dead Sea? Consider God’s miraculous presence in the towering pillar of cloud (water vapor) in daylight and fire at night that led the Hebrew children through the wilderness. Is that more magnificent than His manifestation in the massive, silver-lined thunderclouds that daily dash over the earth’s surface with frightful sound and flashing fury? And is Jesus’ instantaneous miracle of turning water into wine any more amazing than God’s gradual miracle of drawing colorless, tasteless water up from the earth and forcing it through twining vines to produce sweet and savory grapes out of which wine is made? The Bible gives us a beautiful picture of this:

In that day sing to her,
“A vineyard of red wine!
I, the Lord, keep it, I
water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day” (Isa. 27:2-3).
The idea that the regular processes of nature are miraculous comes out clearly in the book of Job:

He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. He bestows rain on the earth; He sends water upon the countryside (Job 5:9-10 NIV).

He does great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number (Job 9:10).

One of the most startling revelations of the Bible is what it says about who Jesus Christ is, and why He could perform the miracles He did. The amazing truth is that while Jesus was a man, He performed certain local miracles. But prior to His incarnation, and continuing today, He performs all the daily miracles of the whole cosmos. In His supernatural power He maintains all the material aspects of the creation:

[The Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Col. 1:15-17).

This same truth is seen in the first chapter of the book of Hebrews:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed

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heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (vv.1-3). From these passages we learn the foundational biblical doctrine that Jesus is truly God in the flesh—the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who in His preincarnate form was responsible for creating all matter and for continuing to hold all material things together. This being the case, we understand that the One who bonded the first hydrogen atoms with oxygen to form the first life-giving water is the same One who changed the composition of water to wine when He was on the earth—and the same One who offers us the water of eternal life.

**AS A SYMBOL OF LIFE**

Because of the literal relationship of water to life, water has stood figuratively as a symbol of life throughout recorded history. And in the Bible, this life symbolism is made even more significant when it represents the salvation that leads to eternal life. This is first mentioned by Israel's prophet Isaiah:

*Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; “for YAH, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.” Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation (Isa. 12:2-3).*

Since the people of Israel did not remain faithful to their God, they
were reminded of their faithlessness by the prophet Jeremiah, whose entire career was spent admonishing his people to repent:

My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns—broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

. . . O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You will be put to shame. Those who turn away from You will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water (Jer. 2:13; 17:13 NIV).

God is a God of grace and mercy, however. He constantly offers His people a way back to Him. One of the last of the Old Testament prophets foretold the glorious end when Israel finally repents in the last days:

In that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur (Zech. 14:8).

It's fitting that Jesus, the author of the New Covenant, would pick up where the prophet of the Old Covenant left off—announcing to a lone Samaritan woman God's grandest offer to mankind:

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as
well as his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn. 4:10-14).

One of the fascinating facts of the biblical message of salvation for all people is that it was so often communicated first to the lowliest of humanity. The Jews, who received the original written revelation of God, were scorned by the Romans and other conquerors as worthless rabble. The Jews themselves looked down on the Samaritans as one of the lowest castes of human beings. But Jesus revealed His desire and ability to save a lost and sin-ravaged humanity to a Samaritan woman.

Not too long after making His dramatic offer, Jesus made the supreme sacrifice, allowing His life’s blood to be poured out on the ground beneath His cross of crucifixion—history’s greatest act of self-sacrifice, and one that assured forgiveness for sinful mankind. The imagery of shed blood providing sin-healing, life-giving water has been elegantly stated in William Cowper’s hymn *There Is A Fountain*. The hymn is taken from another water metaphor used by Zechariah: “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from
Immanuel’s veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day, and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its power, till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more.

E’er since, by faith, I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply, redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die.

The confirmation of Jesus’ ability to provide the water of life came shortly after His crucifixion, when He arose from the grave.

Then, after showing Himself alive to His disciples, He ascended into heaven where He waits until the appointed moment of His promised return.

The apostle John wrote the account of Jesus’ offer of “living water” to the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4). Many years later he received a visionary revelation from Jesus, who said:

It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts (Rev. 21:6).

John went on to declare that Jesus “showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

John was actually given a glimpse into the future fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy.
The apostle also said that Jesus had expanded His generous offer to the Samaritan woman to all of us—the very last invitation of salvation in the Bible:

COME! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

So water becomes the bookends of the Bible. It appears in the beginning as the source and substance of all temporal life, and it appears again at the end as the great symbol for eternal life.

What a wonder water is! Humanity—all of life—would not exist without it. And everlasting life would not be ours without that miraculous water represented in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Have you responded to Jesus’ invitation to partake of the water of life? If not, now would be a wonderful time to go to the Source of all water, and forgiveness, and eternal life. Accept and trust the One who is the real wonder of water (Jn. 1:1-14).
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