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WATER

Some time ago, while reading the life story of a desert pioneer, Marshall McKinney, I received a new appreciation for something many of us take for granted: WATER!

Born in 1904, Marshall was about six years old when the family moved here to the desert, settling first in the Morongo Valley area north of Palm Springs. At that time the government was giving away 160-acre parcels of desert land; but certain requirements had to be met. Homesteaders had to build a dwelling, live there for a period of time, *and put down a well.*

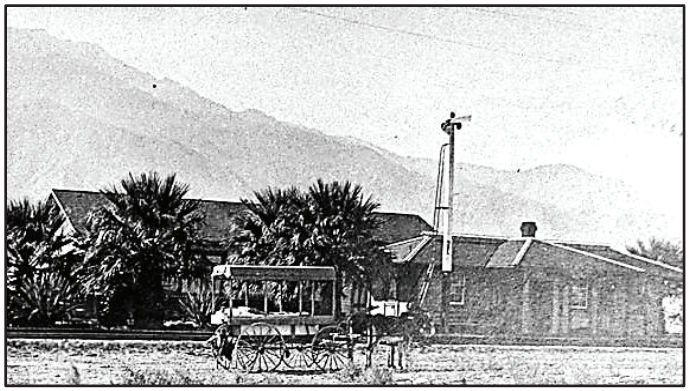
Despite summer temperatures that reached 120 degrees, no air conditioning, sand storms, and isolation, Marshall's father moved his family to the desert. His purpose was to obtain a land grant, but also to become a well driller for other homesteaders.

He had purchased a huge steam-operated rig—primitive by today's standards—which, along with the necessary tools, required three horse-drawn wagons to move it from place to place. Before digging a well, it took several days to set up. To make steam, considerable water was required—water which was not available at the site, obviously. That's why a well was needed!

The closest water might be hours away. A wagon with a 500-gallon water tank was used for this purpose. But if too much water was hauled at a time, the horses were unable to pull the wagon across the desert sands. Usually, firewood was not readily available either, but might be found along a wash from dead cottonwoods or, preferably, mesquite.

Sometimes when drilling a well, Marshall's father would hit a solid rock deep down in the ground. For this he had a huge chisel-type instrument that weighed 450 pounds. To increase the weight, a bar of steel about 12 feet long and weighing 250 pounds, as well as some other parts, were bolted together. One time the parts came unbolted, about 100 feet down, and he had to go to Los Angeles to rent a special tool.

By using the (shortcut) trail through Little Morongo Canyon, it took six hours to walk to the railroad station (shown in the accompanying old photo). In the background is Mount San Jacinto towering over 10,000 feet above the desert floor. Notice the horse-drawn "taxi" awaiting train passengers for Palm Springs.



From here it was 106 miles to Los Angeles where he made arrangements for a special tool to be shipped. Allowing four days to make sure the tool would be at the station, Mr. McKinney drove his horses and wagon to the station by road which took 11 hours. With the special tool, he successfully retrieved the parts.

What then took 11 hours, would *now* take about a half hour by car on a paved road!

We have all benefited from those who have gone before us. We have "entered into their labors" (cf. John 4:38). This is true in many things, like the highways we drive, bridges we cross, and certainly the *water* systems we tend to take for granted. How different our lives would be, if—like the woman at Jacob's well (John 4:6-26)—we had to *carry* all our water from a distant well!

As settlers moved westward in this country, they were often forced to take longer routes in order to have water for the needs of their families and horses. Their very *life* depended on water.

Many years ago, the Sons of the Pioneers had a hit song called "Cool Water." It told the story of a man and his horse, lost in a barren wasteland, searching for water. Words like, "Old Dan and I with throats burnt dry and souls that cry for water," described their desperation. Other words in the song expressed their hope for God's intervention—that "way up there He'll hear our prayer and show us where there's **water**."

Back in the '30s, the Sons of the Pioneers singing group was founded by Roy Rogers, Bob Nolan, and Tim Spencer. Tim—to whom I am related (howbeit *indirectly*)—later founded Manna Music to promote gospel songs, one of which was "How Great Thou Art." As a result, it became *very* well-known, being recorded by a wide range of singers including Elvis Presley, George Beverly Shea, and many more.

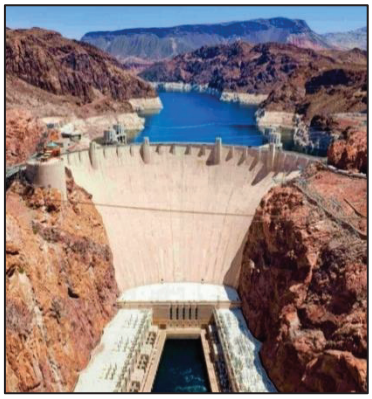
When I was in my early teens, one night at a church camp we were entertained as different skits were performed. In one, a young man frantically cried out, "Water! Water!" It was as though he had been lost in a desert for days without water. His cries for water continued for some time, until finally, off in the distance, he seemed to see signs of civilization. Staggering on in that direction, he continued his desperate cry for water. As he drew near, someone came out to meet him and handed him a glass of water. He grabbed the glass, pulled a comb out of his pocket, dipped it in the water, and *combed his hair!*

Typical of stories with a twist, the surprise at the end provides the punch—as juvenile as this one was. But in the real world, multiplied thousands of people, unable to find water, have died.

Water for drinking is important; it can even be life-saving. But we may not normally think of how *powerful* water can be in other

ways, as in a steam locomotive. When water is heated and becomes steam, it can be *very* powerful! I am thinking of the Union Pacific "Big Boy." Now over 80 years old, and having been restored by the railroad to operating condition, it tours the country from time to time, always drawing large crowds. It was of special interest for me, on one occasion, to sit in the engineer's seat of this massive locomotive.

The length of the locomotive with tender is **133** feet and weighs over a **million** pounds! It is the largest operational steam locomotive in the world. It can use up to 12,000 gallons of **water** an hour, but in so doing, can pull a very long train—an intriguing example of how powerful **water,** when heated, can become!



Water is also a tremendous power source at places like Hoover Dam. As the water of the Colorado River flows through massive turbines, electricity is generated for parts of Nevada, Arizona, and California—including Palm Springs.

The Colorado River begins as a small stream in Rocky Mountain National Park. Just for fun, let's consider the journey a drop of water makes as it continues from there for over a *thousand* miles to Hoover Dam.

It will pass through a variety of scenic canyons—Gore, Glenwood, Ruby, and the most famous: the Grand Canyon in Arizona. At Lake Mead, it will wait its turn, and finally (along with millions of other drops that have joined in along the way), flow through the generating turbines to produce electricity.

From there, the resulting electricity will travel for 200 miles along a wire at a speed of up to nearly 186,000 miles per *second!* Having *quickly* arrived at Palm Springs, it is now providing power to my computer on which I am composing this article and, later, will provide electrical power to run the press that prints this article. It is truly amazing!

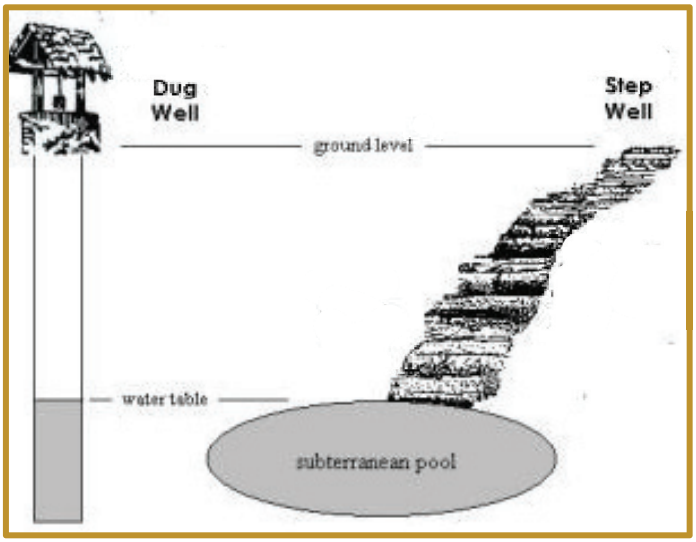
Water has *many* uses!

All the meat, fish, fruits and vegetables we eat, would be nonexistent without **water**. We use water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing, brushing teeth, flushing toilets, and extinguishing fires. It is used for washing food, dishes, clothes, and vehicles. Water-related recreational activities include swimming, boating, and fishing.

***Water* is also a vital element in baptism**.

It is sometimes assumed that the Roman Catholic Church does not believe in **immersion**. But according to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, sprinkling, pouring, *and immersion,* are all considered valid modes of water baptism. In fact, immersion is actually upheld as the *original* and better representation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. John baptized in places where there was "**much** water" (John 3:23), definitely implying *immersion.*

Wells (as shown in the accompanying drawing) were of two basic types. One type had a vertical shaft with no access other than from the top, where water was drawn up in a bucket. The other type—sometimes called a **stepwell**—had a series of steps or a pathway leading down to the water.



It was apparently a stepwell from which Rebekah obtained water. "Rebekah…came out with her pitcher on her shoulder…the young woman…went **down** to the well, filled her pitcher, and came **up**" (Gen. 24:15, 16, 45).

Was this also the case when Philip baptized the Ethiopian?

On the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, Philip met up with a high-ranking Ethiopian official who invited him to ride in his chariot. Philip "preached Jesus to him." When "they came to some **water**…the eunuch said, 'See, here is **water**. What hinders me from being baptized?'"

"So he ordered the chariot to stand still. And *both* Philip and the eunuch *went down into* the **water**, and he baptized him. Now when *they* came up out of the **water**," Philip was suddenly caught away, and the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:36-39).

The Greek word *eis* (here translated "into"), is often translated "unto" or "to." So, the wording about Philip and the eunuch going down **to** the water—and coming **up** out of the water—*could* be referring to water accessed by a stepwell. If so, this gives a different meaning to going "down into the water" and "coming out of the water," wording sometimes use to support immersion.

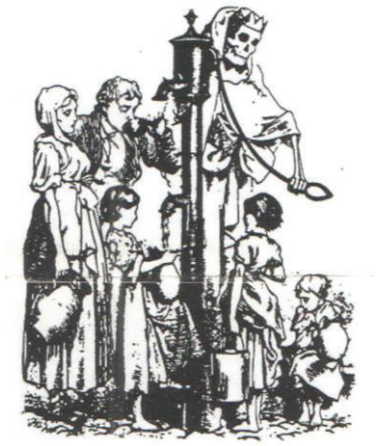
But—*either way*—immersion is not ruled out. On the long journey from Jerusalem back to Ethiopia, a good supply of drinking water was always carried along. If the baptism of the eunuch was by *pouring* or *sprinkling,* water from a **canteen** would have been sufficient! They could have stopped **anywhere** to do this—long before the eunuch said, "Here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?"

In the Bible, wells were highly regarded. If people in one tribe wanted to cause havoc for another tribe, they would stop up their

wells. This is what the Philistines did to wells that were dug by Abraham's servants. But later, we read:

> "And Isaac **dug again** the wells of water, which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them up" (Gen. 26:18).

This is a great preaching text with a spiritual application. *We* need to dig again the *old* wells, as it were, making certain that nothing hinders the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives!



The accompanying old drawing portrays the sad case of people obtaining water, unaware it is unfit and could even cause death. In many parts of the world, there are multitudes of people who needlessly suffer on and on because of contaminated water. I admire missionary organizations that go into poverty-stricken villages and take the necessary steps so people can have safe water to drink.

In the Bible, even the young preacher Timothy suffered misery because of impure water. This prompted Paul's instructions: "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (1 Tim. 5:23 NIV).

Years ago, I heard Fred Jordan say, "Every wino on Skid Row knows this verse!" But, taken in context, this was for medicinal purposes—not an endorsement of *excessive* drinking. Paul had earlier warned about the *misuse* of wine in this very *same* book (1 Tim. 3:8).

"Beer"—a well-known word in our culture—has a different meaning in Scripture. It is translated from a Hebrew word meaning **well.** Examples include: "Beer Elim" (Isa. 15:8). "Baalath Beer" (Josh. 19:8). "Beer Lahai Roi" [Well of the One Who Lives and Sees Me] (Gen. 16:14). "Beer-sheba" [Well of the Oath] (Gen. 21:31). Names given to wells—like Beer-sheba—commonly provided names for towns that developed at these locations.

"From Dan even to Beersheba" (Judges 20:1; 2 Sam. 3:10) was an often-used term to describe the north-south limits of Palestine—another way of saying from one end to the other.

> The phrase once came up in a Sunday School class. Someone asked, "Am I to understand that Dan and Beersheba are the names of *places?"*
>
> "Yes," the teacher responded.
>
> "Really? I always thought they were *husband* and *wife*—like Sodom and Gomorrah!"

As we think about it, quite a few names of cities and towns today have a link with **water**-related words. These are some in California:

At**water**, Bodega **Bay**, Borrego **Springs**, Carmel-By-The-**Sea**, Clear**lake**, Desert Hot **Springs**, Fall**brook**, Half Moon **Bay**, Huntington **Beach**, **Lake**port, Long **Beach**, Morro **Bay**, Mammoth **Lakes**, Newport **Beach**, **Ocean**side, Palm **Springs**, **River**side, **Sea**side, **Spring**ville, Walnut **Creek**, Wood**lake**, etc.

Many common SAYINGS are *water*-related:

Where will you meet your Waterloo?

This saying is based on Napoleon's crushing 1815 defeat which occurred a few miles south of Brussels near the town of **Waterloo,** meaning: *forest by the water*.

Cast your bread upon the *waters.*

This saying comes from Ecclesiastes 11:1: "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days." This has produced a variety of possible explanations. It could be the idea is simply this: Doing good (like giving to help the poor) might *seem* senseless—much like casting bread upon the waters—but in time, even this may come back around in a positive way.

Many *waters* cannot quench love (Song of Solomon 8:7).

That's *water* under the bridge.

You can lead a horse to *water,* but you can't make him drink.

Come hell or high *water.*

You don't miss the *water* until the *well* runs dry.

Here are some lines about **water** from the classic motion picture *Casablanca:*

> **Captain Renault:** What in heaven's name brought you to Casablanca?
>
> **Rick:** My health. I came to Casablanca for the **waters.**
>
> **Captain Renault:** The **waters?** What **waters?** We're in the desert.
>
> **Rick:** I was *misinformed.*

Rick may have been "misinformed" about the "waters" in Casablanca, but there is a place where everyone can find waters—*spiritual* waters—**free:**

"Ho! *Everyone* who thirsts, *come* to the **waters**; and you who have no money, come…without money and without price"! (Isa. 55:1). "W*hoever* desires, let him take the **water** of life *freely"* (Rev. 22:17). In a troubled world, it is comforting to know that "The LORD is my shepherd…He leads me beside the *still* **waters**" (Psa. 23:1, 2).

Water-related words—like showers, springs, rivers, waters etc.—have provided the theme for many gospel songs:

Oh, the joy of sins forgiven,
Oh, the bliss the blood-washed know,
Oh, there's peace akin to Heaven,
*Where the healing **waters** flow.*

I thirsted in the barren land of sin and shame,
And nothing satisfying there I found;
But to the blessed cross of Christ one day I came,
*Where **springs** of living water did abound.*

*There is a **river** that flows from deep within*
*There is a **fountain**, that frees the soul from sin*
*Come to this **water**, there is a vast supply*
*There is a **river**, that never shall run dry.*

One Sunday morning when it was raining, I chose Ezekiel 34:26 for my sermon text: "… there shall be **showers** of blessing." We also sang the hymn with that title.

Ever since 1864—back when Abraham Lincoln was President—Christians have sung "Shall We Gather at the River?"

*Yes, we'll gather at the **river**,*
*The beautiful, the beautiful **river***
*Gather with the saints at the **river***
That flows from the throne of God.

When I was a teenager, we sang a chorus: "I've Got Peace Like a River." Because a river is sometimes *not* peaceful—it may overflow its banks, leaving death and destruction in its path—I questioned if this chorus was "Scriptural"! But then one day I read almost these exact words in Isaiah: "I will extend peace to her *like a river"* (Isa. 66:12).

A river can be defined as a large amount of water that is *flowing,* continually receiving more from a *higher source.* So, God's "peace **like** a river," speaks of his unlimited, abounding supply. Imagine a man drinking water at the bank of the mighty Mississippi River. He could never drink it dry! Neither can we exhaust the abundant, overwhelming **peace** that God has promised! (Phil. 4:7). A hymn writer has expressed it this way:

Oh, the peace that Jesus gives
It never dies; it always lives.
Like a river deep and long,
With its current ceaseless, strong,
Is the peace that Jesus gives.

The Bible itself *begins* and *ends* with a **river**. In Genesis, "a *river* went out of Eden," and in Revelation we read about "a pure *river* of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God" (Gen. 2:10; Rev. 22:1).

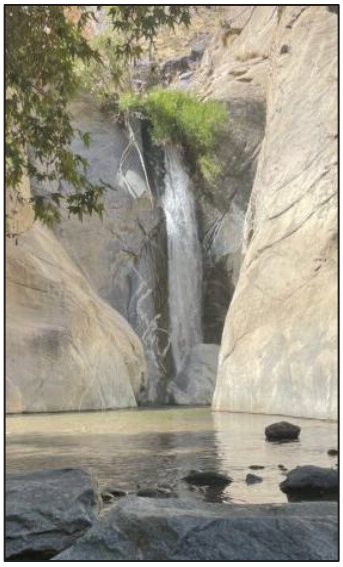
Streams of water, of course, are common in many parts of the world. But when these streams are in the *desert,* a beautiful **contrast** emerges. The prophets—familiar with the vast desert areas in the Bible lands—often used this contrast to illustrate spiritual truth:

> "The **desert** shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose…in the wilderness shall **waters** break out, and **streams** in the **desert**…the parched ground shall become a **pool**, and the thirsty land **springs of water**" (Isa. 35:1, 6).

Sometimes we go through a dry place in our spiritual lives. We may feel like God has deserted us in the *desert.* Perhaps you, dear reader, are going through a "dry place" in your spiritual journey right now. There may be problems you cannot solve, questions that have no answers, and prayers that seemingly have gone unheard. Well, let your faith be inspired by this glad truth: It is in the *dry place* He has promised **streams in the desert!**

Palm Springs is located in the desert. But as the name implies, it *does* have "palms" (thousands of them) and **springs—** also waterfalls and streams.

There *are* streams in the desert!



Tahquitz Falls, a 60-foot waterfall, is located near downtown Palm Springs.

The off-season for living in the desert is the **hot** summer. Nearly every day the temperature climbs to over 100 degrees! But the *advantage* of the warmer climate is that it makes for a very mild winter. For this reason, the population here swells considerably in the winter months.

It may be of some interest to include the monthly average high temperatures for Palm Springs:

January 71°, February 74°, March 80°, April 88°, May 96°, June 103°, July 108°, August 107°, September 102°, October 91°, November 79°, December 69°.

This desert—extending from Palm Springs over into Arizona (Phoenix and Yuma)—has more days of **sunshine** than anywhere else in the country. This is a desert *plus.*

> "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and *cried out,* saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow **rivers of living water**" (John 7:37, 38).

While Jewish priests chanted the words of Isaiah 12:3 about drawing water out of the wells of salvation, a golden container, with water from the pool of Siloam, was carried in solemn procession to the altar and its contents poured out.

This commemorated the time their forefathers had supernaturally received water in the days of Moses. But for the majority of these people, what had been a reality back then, had degenerated into mere ritualism. They talked of living water, their ceremonies symbolized it, they sang about it, but failed to recognized that **Jesus** is the very fountain of living waters.

It was in *this* setting—with **water** on the minds of the people—that Jesus cried out: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to **me** and drink"!

The earthly waters of the ritual did not satisfy; the people were thirsty still. But through Jesus, we can find the true water, a satisfaction for our thirst, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). **1/2026**

Additional printed copies of this article "WATER" may be obtained *free* upon request. Many additional articles are listed on the website.

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