



Editorial

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In the second-century BCE, the Jewish sage Ben Sira declared that “The necessities of life are water, bread, and clothing” (Sir 29:21). Water belongs first on any list: all creatures need it to survive, and human communities have long organized themselves in proximity to viable water sources. Water access is a constant challenge in the arid climate of the Middle East, where the biblical writers and their audiences lived. Ancient beliefs about God can often be traced to problems over water.

The current issue of *Interpretation* brings together diverse experts on the topic of water, including biblical scholars, scientists, ethicists, and education specialists. The reader will find global perspectives on the crisis, along with creative analysis of the many biblical texts dealing with water.

First, James Butler and Carey Johnson apply their expertise in hydrology to the water crisis in the United States. Specifically, they examine the depletion of aquifers in Kansas and the generational inequities that can result from overconsumption. With fascinating and comprehensive detail, Butler and Johnson show the perils of excessive pumping for agricultural purposes, and they provide clear suggestions for reform, including clergy involvement in facilitating change.

The Hebrew Bible deals extensively with water: its availability, fundamental importance for human existence, and the Deity’s control over its flow. In a thorough analysis, Mari Joerstad addresses the various terms for water in the Hebrew Bible, from rivers to cisterns, and she explains what these signify in the biblical texts. Joerstad pays close attention to the theological implications of her survey, noting that “The authors of the Bible knew God through the regular, normal seasons and access to water, not through signs and wonders.”

Nelci Ndolu describes the water crisis in her native country of Indonesia, as she provides an innovative reading of an obscure passage in Genesis. She examines how cement mining in Indonesia is depleting the karst layer that contains so much of the country’s vital water sources. Then she offers a creative, ecocentric reading of the confrontation between Isaac and the Gerarites in Gen 26:18–20. Ndolu demonstrates that the shepherds of Gerar are admirably maintaining a longstanding water source, and that their actions can serve as a model for “focal restoration” today.

The global impact of water depletion is considerable, and Christiana Zenner highlights the ethical implications specifically in relation to women. She examines how scarcity harms women’s ability to attend to their essential health needs and safely obtain water for themselves and their families. Through interdisciplinary analysis and with thorough data to support her claims, Zenner shows how sexist, colonialist mindsets threaten women and their access to fresh water. She concludes the essay with an innovative hermeneutical move, by looking at the woman who bleeds in Mark 5:24–35.

According to Zenner's convincing analysis, the hemorrhaging woman is the hero of the story, as she publicly draws attention to her ailment and protests societal injustices.

Finally, Jennifer Ayres turns the reader's attention to the waters of baptism. In an essay that includes compelling biography and deep theological reflection, Ayres explores the meaning of baptism, both its mystery ("baptism into death") and promise (the life-giving power of water). As climates change and populations grow, and arid conditions worsen, Ayres's essay (and the others in this issue) remind us that "Water is life."

Samuel L. Adams