The Bible is full of references to water, from stories and poetry to ceremonial laws. Rev Dr Steve de Gruchy finds out the faith lessons from the floods.

Water of life:
A divine symbol

Given the desert conditions of the Bible lands, it is not surprising that water quenches thirst and when the angel provided Elijah with food and a jar of water to encourage him in his ministry in difficult times.

Physical thirst becomes a metaphor for spiritual longing, as in Psalm 42: "As a deer pants for flowing streams so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

Sacriment
All of these understandings of water are gathered into the sacrament of baptism which picturizes water at the very centre of the life of the church.

Here it carries the deep symbolism of all that we have noted above: purification, healing, quenching, and the journey from slavery into the promised land. In this sacrament, the church reminds us that because water is a foundation of life it can be used by the Holy Spirit to represent the foundation of the new life that Jesus gives us in baptism.

Water is a living thing, a gift from God, and so it is the most appropriate element of creation that can be taken up by God to represent the new creation and participation in the covenant of grace. Jesus工作 with this idea of water as life in his wonderful conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well: "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

All people living in that part of the world would be well aware of the difference between living water and dead water because of the relationship between the Jordan river and the Dead Sea.

Using this symbolism, Jesus uses the idea of water to symbolise the new life that he offers to people. This idea is carried over into the vision of the new Jerusalem where the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city (Revelation 21:1). Here we see again how water is so important for life, that it comes to symbolise even life in the coming Kingdom of God.

This deep symbolic and sacramental understanding of water we find in the Bible and church is a reminder that Christians are called in this time of struggle over access to water to ensure that love for our neighbour involves a commitment to his or her right to water.