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MINISTRIES

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The Tabernacle: The Brazen Laver

The tabernacle in the wilderness was God’s dwelling place among the Israelites after he freed them from slavery in Egypt. It can be a chore to read through the passages that describe the tabernacle, but it turns out that the tabernacle is full of symbolism and spiritual lessons that teach us about our relationship with God. For a quick introduction to what the tabernacle was, we recommend watching our teaching, *The Tabernacle: An Introduction*. In this teaching, we’re going to take a close look at one particular component of the tabernacle: the brazen laver. We’re going to examine how this laver was used, and what it teaches about being washed spiritually by Jesus, or Yeshua as he was called in Hebrew. Let’s get started.

The tabernacle was a building that contained various sacred vessels, including the Ark of the Covenant, where God’s glory dwelled. Surrounding the tabernacle was an open-air courtyard, surrounded by walls made of linen sheets. The courtyard contained two major items: the altar, where sacrifices were offered, and the brazen laver. We read about this laver (which is sometimes called a *basin* or a *washbasin*, depending on the Bible translation) in Exodus 30:

Exodus 30:17-21

The LORD [YHWH] said to Moses, “You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD [YHWH], they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.”

We aren’t given the size of the laver, but we are told it was made out of bronze. The laver was positioned between the altar and the entrance to the tent of meeting, which is the tabernacle proper. Every time the priests would serve in the tent of meeting, or would make offerings on the altar, they would first wash their hands and feet in this laver. The laver was also used to wash the priests when they first became priests, when they went through their consecration ceremony. We find that in Exodus 29:

Exodus 29:4-9

You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

So, when the priests were consecrated, they were first “washed” with water from the laver and then they were clothed in the priestly garments and anointed (Exodus 29:21). Once this service was performed, they were officially considered priests, and from then on they could perform their service in the tabernacle.

This laver was only used by the priests, not by the common people. The priests washed their whole bodies with it during their consecration, and then they washed their hands and feet in it whenever they ministered in the tabernacle thereafter.

When we think about the spiritual significance of washing with water, the first thing that comes to mind is baptism. In our teaching, *The Tabernacle: The Altar of Sacrifice*, we talk about how the offerings given on the altar are symbolic of how we spiritually gain access to God’s kingdom. It seems only natural, then, that the laver next to the altar would be a symbol of baptism, the sign of our commitment to God’s kingdom.

We will not be giving baptism a thorough treatment in this teaching. For that, we recommend our teaching, [What is Baptism?](#) However, there are several aspects of baptism that we want to emphasize here. First, baptism is accompanied by repentance from our sins. Paul speaks about this in Romans:

Romans 6:1-7

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua] were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

So Paul connects baptism to death—specifically, to the death of our sinful nature, our flesh. He says that we must turn from sin, we must “crucify our old self” and be “buried” when we are baptized, so that we will be resurrected as a new creature who is set free from sin and “walk[s] in newness of life.” In other words, we must have a change of heart; we must turn away from our sins and start listening to God. Peter also connects baptism to repentance from sin:

Acts 2:38-39

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone

whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

(see also: Matthew 3:4-8; Acts 22:16)

So, we can see that repentance and baptism go hand-in-hand. In the same way, when the priests washed in the brazen laver, they were “dying to their flesh;” they were committing to serving God rather than serving themselves. If we keep digging, we find even more connections between baptism and the consecration of the priests. When the priests were consecrated, they were anointed with oil. In the Scriptures, anointing frequently symbolizes receiving God’s spirit:

1 Samuel 16:13

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD [YHWH] rushed upon David from that day forward.

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Lord GOD [YHWH] is upon me, because the LORD [YHWH] has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...

Acts 10:38

...God anointed Jesus [Yeshua] of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

So, the priests were washed and anointed with oil, symbolizing the holy spirit. Besides repentance, what else accompanies baptism in the Scriptures? You guessed it: the spirit of God!

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:3-5

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit

(See also: Isaiah 1:16-18; Matthew 3:11-12, 16; Acts 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 6:11)

So, the consecration of the priests, where they were washed with water and anointed with oil, parallels baptism, where we are washed with water and receive God’s spirit. Symbolically, baptism also consecrates us as priests—not Levitical priests, but spiritual priests. After they were washed in the laver and anointed, the job of the Levitical priests was to minister to God’s people and help them bring their offerings to the tabernacle. Similarly, after we have been baptized and receive God’s spirit, our job is to minister to others and bring them into God’s kingdom:

1 Peter 2:5

[Y]ou yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua].

Revelation 1:5-6

... To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

When the priests went through their consecration washing, it was a total conversion of their life. They went from ordinary people to priests, ministers whose life was dedicated to serving at the tabernacle and helping bring other people into fellowship with God. In the same way, when we are baptized, repent from our sins, and receive God's spirit, it is a total life conversion. We go from death to life, from a hard heart to a soft heart, from a lifestyle of sin to a lifestyle of righteousness and ministry. The priests' consecration only happened once in their lives; they did not have to be "reconsecrated" over and over again.

In the same way, we do not have to be baptized and re-converted over and over again. However, the priests did regularly perform a washing of their hands and feet. This was not as thorough of a washing as the consecration washing, and this washing happened frequently, so this would not represent baptism. It's just a washing of the hands and feet, not a total life overhaul. So, then, what does this smaller, more regular washing symbolize? To answer that, there is another detail about the laver that we think is significant: the laver was made out of bronze mirrors.

Exodus 38:8

He made the basin of bronze and its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting.

Of course, mirrors are highly reflective; that's their whole purpose. So, when a priest washed himself in the laver, made out of mirrors, he would see his reflection in it; he would see where he had dirt on him that he needed to wash off. Spiritually speaking, what shows us the "dirt" that we need to wash off after we have been converted? God's word does:

Ephesians 5:25-27

...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

James further specifies which part of God's word functions as a "mirror:" it is God's law.

James 1:22-25

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

God's law, like a mirror, shows us the dirty things in our life, and, like water, it helps us to wash those things off. Paul too speaks about how the law shows him where his sins are:

Romans 7:7

... if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

The priests underwent a total body washing one time, and after that they would regularly examine themselves and wash their hands and feet. In the same way, we go through a total life conversion one time, where we receive God's spirit and commit ourselves to God's service. After that, we regularly look into God's word to show us the parts of us we need to "wash." We do not have to be "baptized" over and over again, but just to "wash our hands and feet," to clean off the things that are becoming dirty, and make ourselves ready for ministry. Yeshua used this exact terminology when he was preparing his disciples for their ministry:

John 13:10-15

Jesus [Yeshua] said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

By washing their feet, Yeshua was preparing his disciples for their coming ministry. He instructed them to "wash one another's feet" as well. How can we do that? By helping to keep each other spot-free and prepared to minister; to motivate our fellow believers to stay clean from sin and do what is right.

Hebrews 10:22-25

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

When the priests washed their hands and feet, it was not as extensive a cleansing as their washing of consecration. But, it would still remind them of their consecration, since they were washing with water from the same vessel. In the same way, whenever we wash our hands and feet—when we examine ourselves using the word of God, we can remember how we were convicted and transformed when we encountered his word for the first time. That constant reminding can help us to pursue righteousness with energy and zeal, just like we did when we first became a part of God's kingdom.

So, the laver symbolizes us becoming righteous in two different ways. First, it symbolizes how we became righteous the first time: by being baptized, dying to our sins, being covered by the blood of Christ, having our hearts transformed, and receiving God's spirit. And second, it symbolizes how we stay righteous: by examining ourselves regularly using God's word and washing ourselves clean when we become dirty from our contact with the sinful world.

However, the laver represents even more than that; being consecrated by washing in the laver makes a person a *priest*, that is, a minister. A priest's job is to help others present their offerings to God, and priests also are the only ones allowed to enter into the tabernacle building, the holy place. In the same way, after we are converted and baptized and commit our lives to God, that's not where our walk ends. On the contrary, that is where our ministry begins. The Scriptures exhort us to "go on to maturity" after we have come to faith in God:

Hebrews 6:1-3

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

Our journey toward the presence of God does not stop when we become members of his kingdom. That's just entering the "outer court," so to speak. We still have a life of ministry ahead of us, and a whole tabernacle to delve into. To explore the symbolism in the rest of the tabernacle, and to learn more about what it means to be a minister, we invite you to continue watching the teachings in this tabernacle series. Most of all, we encourage you to keep pressing forward in your relationship with God, and to continue to wash yourself with the word, grow in love and good works, and draw closer to him.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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