

# The Laver

## FROM SACRIFICE TO SERVICE

BY PASTOR BILLY ELIAS

Virtually all Christians have heard about the Tabernacle Tent of Meeting (*Mishkan Ohel Moeyd*), but how many understand the importance of the place where God dwelled with his people Israel?

The Hebrew word *mishkan* comes from the root word *shakan* which means “to reside or permanently stay (literally or figuratively):—abide, continue, (cause to, make to) dwell (-er), have habitation, inhabit, lay, place, (cause to) remain, rest, set (up)” (*Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Concordance*). From this basic meaning, we can deduce that it means to lie still with and be intimate. What, then, needs to happen in order for us to become intimate with the Lord of hosts? I believe that one of the furnishings in the Tabernacle sets the tone and tempo for beginning intimacy with God.

### THE LAVER

“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base

of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the Lord. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations.” (Exodus 30:17 – 21, NASB).

One of the many aspects of the Tabernacle that has always captivated me is that it is a place of boundaries. There are specific dimensions for its height, width, colors, poles, and what kind of materials were to be used. The Tabernacle was a place of order. As the rabbis teach, when one is asked, “How is your house,” the answer should be “*Beth seder*” (My house is in order.) Since the Tabernacle is the house of God, both the house and everyone entering into its service should be in order.

### SACRIFICE AND SERVICE

The laver is what separates those who would sacrifice from those who would serve. As one entered the courtyard of the Tabernacle, he immediately found two pieces of furniture, the brazen altar and the laver. He saw the offerings being made: the animals were killed by the offender, and then the dismembered and placed on the altar by the priests. The priesthood is a bloody business; hence, the placement of the second piece of furniture, the laver.

The word *laver* in Hebrew is כִּיּוֹר (*kiyov*) and is translated as “something round . . . a washbowl; also a pulpit or platform” (*Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Concordance*)

As we find two separate places in the book



of Exodus, the laver was made of bronze from the mirrors of the women whom God called to give a free will offering from those who served at the tent of meeting (Exodus 38:8).

Two parts of the laver are mentioned: a bowl for water and a base or pedestal sometimes called a foot. We do not know if it had a second bowl at ground level for washing one's feet or not. Stephen F. Olford holds to the view that the laver had a wash basin on ground level, so one could easily dip his feet into the water for cleansing.<sup>1</sup>

Scripture is clear, however, that before the priests could enter into the tent for the service of God, they had to wash themselves in the laver to make themselves clean. The laver, then, was the place for the priests not only cleaned their faces, hands, and feet, but it was also a platform, a pulpit of transparency.

"How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:1-5). David is very clear here: it is only upon forgiveness and cleansing that we can be transparent not only in service but in intimacy with our Father.

#### LIVING WATERS AND THE MIQVEH

One of the interesting aspects of the laver is that the waters used in it had to be living waters. Still water becomes stagnant so that life cannot exist within it. Living waters, however, are those that flow. The water of the laver could come only from rainfall, a waterfall, rivers, underground wells and streams: waters that bring life! Some rabbis believe that "faucets on the basin drained it at appropriate times."<sup>2</sup> This further illustrates the need for clean, flowing waters that continually purify and cleanse. For believers, this can only be accomplished through intimacy which comes not only from sacrifice but also from relationship with the true living waters that flow only through the Spirit of God.

To bathe or to cleanse in these waters was called a *miqveh*. The Hebrew word מִקְוֶה (*miqveh*) is translated to mean "from binding with God." The word picture is that of a rope with multiple strands in which the beholder cannot tell where one strand begins and the

other ends. Only those who could bind with God were able to enter into the Holy Place where the "service of God" took place. The *miqveh* has two purposes that were important not only for the priests but also for us today. These are 1) Preparation and 2) Presentation.

#### PREPARATION

The preparation phase begins after the sacrifice is offered. We have come to the altar confessed our sins, asked for forgiveness, and hopefully, placed ourselves, our hands, and our own hearts into the sacrifice acceptable to God.

One important passage that refers to the *miqveh* is found in John's account of the wedding at Cana. "When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.' Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each."

The water pots were empty because the bride and groom had ceremonially cleansed themselves (*miqveh*) to *prepare* themselves before consummating the union and sealing the covenant they had made. They would then *present* themselves to God ready to be fruitful, multiply, and begin a new covenant and life together! The lesson here is this: it is our "presentation" to God that separates the called from the chosen.

#### PRESENTATION

One of the biggest problems is to get believers to take the step of moving from the brazen altar (the place of sacrifice) to the laver, the place of readiness. Remember that Scripture is clear that the laver was made from bronze with its base of bronze, from the mirrors of the serving women. When the priests left the altar they would be filthy, covered with blood, ash, dirt, the entrails, and sinew of the sacrifices. Their

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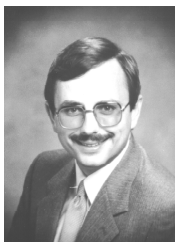


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flowing waters  
that continually  
purify and  
cleanse.**

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faces, hands, feet, and hair were covered with the things necessary for defeating sin. In order to enter into the Holy Place that housed the menorah, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense, they had to be cleansed!

This is not just a ritual cleansing to be certain. Anyone can shower and have the outward appearance of cleanliness. Solomon, however, writes a commentary on Exodus 30:38: "As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man" (Proverbs 27:19, NASB).

As the laver was made from bronze and mirrors and was filled with living waters that were "clear," so there would be a clear reflection of the one cleansing. Every time the priest washed his hands and his face, he would see his reflection through the living waters in the basin. He would see himself as he was about to enter into the holy place and service. He had to be transparent as his reflection was staring back at him.

The pulpit, the platform (laver) was the living Word of God speaking deep into his heart without his hearing a spoken word. Paul talks about the maturing of the believer when we are forced to see ourselves in a mirror and to allow the true purpose of the work of the Lord—to flow through us, but this occurs only when we are ready to present ourselves to the service of our King. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:12 - 13, NASB).


#### THE FOOT WASH

"Then [Jesus] poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. So he came to Simon Peter. He said to him, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand

hereafter.' Peter said to Him, 'Never shall you wash my feet!' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.' Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.' Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean" (John 13:5-11).

The priest saw the reflection of his feet as he placed them into the basin of the laver. He saw where he had been, the direction his feet had taken. Were they on the narrow path, or were they quick to run to destruction, as the proverb later said? "From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness . . . So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous (Proverbs 2:13, 20).

In Jesus' washing the disciples' feet, he first made "preparation." He not only humbled himself to the act of foot washer (being transparent before his disciples), but he also acted out of love, there serving as an example of great sacrifice. He then "presented" himself as the epitome of humility and the Great Servant. Jesus was showing his disciples that he was about to go to the "brazen altar" (the cross) for the great sacrifice and that he was then to become the great servant of all mankind, by giving his life for his bride.

Jesus was telling the disciples to walk in his path of sacrifice, preparation, and presentation so they could enter into the service and intimacy of God. "Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.'" The light of life was the great menorah that awaited the priests who were transparent, clean, and saw their sin as they moved from the laver and into the holy place. They were prepared by committing their bodies as living holy sacrifices pleasing to God, and they had presented themselves to walk in the light of life, and the fellowship of intimacy with the King of kings! 

<sup>1</sup> Paul M. Zehr, *God Dwells With His People* (Scottsdale Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Zehr, p. 53.

Pastor Billy Elias is the founder of both Lacey Home Fellowship and United Fútbol Ministries, an international soccer outreach. An ordained minister in Restoration Fellowship International, his ministry features teaching lessons for successful Christian living by emphasizing the Hebraic thought of both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Apostolic Writings. Billy and his wife Peggy and their five children reside in Lacey Township New Jersey.



**We mature  
in Christ  
when we  
are forced  
to see  
ourselves in  
a mirror and  
to allow the  
true  
purpose of  
the work of  
the Lord to  
flow  
through us.**

