

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

224 - The Laver

1. Introduction

One of the many tasks performed by the priests at the Tabernacle was that of washing to purify themselves. This was done prior to entering the Holy Place so they didn't die. One of the objects commanded by God was a large basin for water that was placed between the Altar of Burnt Offering and the door of the Tabernacle. In this lesson we'll talk about **The Laver** and its significance physically and figuratively.

2. The presence of water

Water winds a thread throughout the biblical narrative. At times its in the forefront while at others it recedes into the background. Water appears at the beginning as the deep covers the Earth. It appears as an element of judgment against evil in the flood during the days of Noah. Water represents the power of God as the Egyptians are faced with their streams and even pots of water turned to blood. In the New Testament, water plays a role in salvation becoming a disputed and controversial aspect of doctrine. Under the Law of Moses water appears at the consecration of priests, washing sacrifices and as purification before entering the Holy Place and being in the presence of God. In this lesson we'll focus on water primarily in its role of preparing the priests for service inside the Tabernacle. This centers around the large basin, the Laver, that was commanded by God. In this lesson we'll take a look at its:

- a. Description including materials from which it was made
- b. Its placement at the Tabernacle
- c. Usage of the Laver and warnings associated with it, and
- d. Figurative aspects of the Laver and the water contained within it

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. Description of the Laver and how it was made

As we'll see, the Laver was an important object and misuse or neglect would lead to death. Having said that, as with some of the other objects such as the Lampstand, we have limited information to understand what the Laver looked like or how it was actually made. As we survey available references in Exodus we can form a partial picture of the Laver. The first of these comes from Exodus chapter thirty.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein.” (Ex 30.17-18). We'll cover the

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

224 - The Laver

verses that follow these when we review how the Laver was used but in this statement all we have is God's command to make it and fill it. We aren't given any dimensions so we don't know how tall it was, what shape it was or its volume. As I covered in a previous lesson, the workmen, Bezaleel, Aholiab and the wise hearted that God inspired, were guided by the Lord in crafting these objects. We may not have exact specifications for some of these but they would have understood how it was to be made. We'll discuss possible reasons for that later.

As we continue in the book we find other details that add to our knowledge of this object. As collection of materials needed to make the objects is announced to the children of Israel, we have a summary of what is to be constructed. In this list we find a brief note concerning materials collected for **"the laver and his foot"** (Ex 35.16). While we still don't have a precise description of the Laver we see from this verse that its made in two parts; the Laver itself and a base, referred to as **"his foot"**. This indicates that the Laver was freestanding supported by the foot, or base, created for this purpose. Aside from this added note we still don't have any idea of its size or volume. We know it will hold water, is to be made of brass or more correctly, bronze, and it consists of two parts - a basin and stand, or foot.

As the work is underway we have one more bit of information that will help us get some idea of what it may have looked like. ***"And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the lookingglasses of the women assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."*** (Ex 38.8). Once more we don't have any information about the size or dimensions of the Laver but we have a significant addition to our understanding of it. We know it was made of bronze, which would be a more accurate rendering than brass in the King James Version. But this wasn't just any metal - it was made from the lookingglasses of the women who assembled at the door of the Tabernacle. While this is a rather short passage there's a wealth of information conveyed in it.

The idea of a looking-glass, or mirror, is something we're familiar with today. Mirrors are made from glass and come in a variety of sizes. We have them in our homes and cars and other places. Fitting rooms in department stores are essential for shoppers trying to decide if the clothes their trying on fit and look good or not. We understand all that. We also realize that this is an item that was not only useful in the ancient world, but would have been valuable. The metal from which these were made would have been purified and polished so a person could see themselves. The bronze used in these mirrors would be a durable material and suitable for exposure in an outdoor environment.

We're not told if the bronze for the Laver was melted and then formed but the quality of the metal is a statement within itself. Of note is that the women who donated these were devout. We understand that from the statement that they assembled at the door of the Tabernacle. They were interested in and committed to the work. Another aspect of this is that although the Hebrews spoiled Egypt when they departed, there wasn't a way to easily replace something once

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

224 - The Laver

it was gone. These women were willing to part with a valuable personal object, giving it to the work of the Lord knowing that they couldn't find a substitute for it. Their sacrifice speaks of their love for what was being done. We often focus on the shortcomings of the Hebrews while in the wilderness but we need to be careful not to overlook the good things. This was one of them. The work of creating objects designed and crafted under the direction of God is a facet of their desert existence in which they demonstrated true devotion to the Lord.

We're left with a nebulous description of the Laver but we can see that it was important and served a crucial function in the daily ministry to God. Its importance is emphasized as we take a look at the placement of the Laver at the Tabernacle.

4. Placement of the Laver at the Tabernacle

In the past few lessons I noted that setting up the Tabernacle followed an inside-out sequence. The structure of the Tabernacle including the boards and curtains were setup. The Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat were placed in the Most Holy Place. The Vail was then hung concealing the Ark. Next came the Table of Shewbread, Lampstand and Altar of Incense. Once these were in place the door of the Tabernacle was installed. Next, the Altar of Burnt Offering in was placed in the area to be enclosed by the Court of the Tabernacle. God then directs, "***And thou shalt set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and shalt put water therein.***" (Ex 40.7). The placement is significant as we'll see in a review of how the Laver was to be used. Once the Laver was in place the Court of the Tabernacle was assembled and its door installed.

5. Usage of the Laver and warnings associated with it

A first impression might be that the Laver represents a ritualistic activity and some may even try to find a parallel with practices in Egyptian or other religions. The Laver however represents a strong spiritual element and prophetic figure that we find throughout the biblical narrative. While there may be some vague similarities with pagan culture, the figurative links we'll examine later will dispel that notion. We have a few statements and warnings in regard to the use of the Laver and the conduct of the priests.

Speaking of the Laver, God told Moses, "***For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the Lord: So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations.***" (Ex 30.19-22). These instructions provide us with important information regarding the Laver's significance.

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

224 - The Laver

Significant elements in these instructions include the Laver, water, the priests, the Tabernacle, offerings and the Altar of Burnt Offering. The priests are commanded to wash their hands and feet prior to approaching the altar to make a sacrifice and before entering the Tabernacle. This is directed to the priests implying that only they are authorized to approach the altar to make a sacrifice or to minister in the Holy Place. God selected Aaron and his sons to serve in this capacity and were therefore to represent and serve God before the congregation on behalf of the people. The priests' use of the Laver is therefore restricted, or sanctified, and associated with their office and duties as ministers of the Lord.

Another aspect of this is God's warning that if they failed to wash their hands and feet in the Laver they would die. We saw similar warnings issued to the priests who would enter the Most Holy Place on the day of atonement to offer the blood of the sacrifice. They were to be dressed appropriately, have the incense with them as well as the blood to be offered. Failure to meet these conditions would result in their death (**Lev 16.2-14**). This emphasizes the nature of service to God in the Tabernacle. The Laver, which is often overlooked, may seem to be an insignificant object but the fact that the priests lives depended on correct procedure demands that we take note of its importance. The priests were not to corrupt themselves by neglecting God's commands.

I mentioned water's appearance and pervasive presence throughout the scriptures. Even without discussing its figurative aspects we see the significance of the Laver and water it contained. The Laver was placed between the Tabernacle and the Altar of Burnt Offering. The priests were to cleanse themselves before offering sacrifices or entering the Tabernacle showing there was a need to be made holy or purified continually. As I've stated in other lessons, there wasn't any power in the water itself. There were no properties that transferred spiritual energy or anything to the priest. It was a command of God and was therefore important enough to be remembered as the priests lives depended on it. We'll come back to this point when we examine the figurative links associated with the water and the Laver. The practice of washing before approaching the sacrifices or entering the Tabernacle demonstrates that water plays a central role in what the priests did and has a connection to cleansing, forgiveness, God and redemption.

The sacrifices were to be without spot or blemish. As the priests were performing their duties, washing in water would make them acceptable to handle and offer the animals and their blood as God directed. Washing before entering the Tabernacle performed the same function. The priests would be cleansed and therefore able to approach the place that represented the presence of God. In another lesson I discussed the fact that in a sense the sacrifices being made were offered by God through the agency of the priests. In that sense we can see a purification ordered by God before they were able to handle and present the offering to the Lord. These elements point us in the direction of figurative connections with the sacrifices and the presence of God which we'll discuss now.

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

224 - The Laver

6. Figurative significance of the Laver and water

The figurative connections between the Laver, water and the presence of God are subtle but clear. When we talk about the Bible we understand the thread of blood connected to salvation, cleansing and sanctification but when we shift our attention to water we encounter a variety of arguments against its importance. The Tabernacle and the daily duties of the priests provide a way for us to see just how important the presence of water is.

Water is present in the opening verses of the creation account. The world was without form and void of life. The spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep as God began to issue commands to bring the world into order. In other lessons I've traced the connection between the presence of God, the Holy Spirit and water demonstrating that they're inseparable and vital. The presence of the Laver underscores this connection for us.

The Tabernacle represented the place where the priest made atonement for the sins of the people once a year. The Holy Place was an area they entered everyday as they offered incense and lit the lampstand. The bread of the presence was placed on the Table of Shewbread once a week representing the closeness of God and the people. The Tabernacle overall demonstrates and foreshadows the desire of God to be close to his people. In order to be in his presence the priests were to wash their hands and feet before entering the Tabernacle and when leaving to offer sacrifices. Aside from other connections we can make figuratively, the fact remains that water and the presence of God are intertwined. This is God's design and is physically represented in the Laver and water at the Tabernacle.

The priests had to cleanse themselves in order to be in the presence of God inside the Tabernacle or to offer the sacrifices. This was a stipulation God set in place and failure to observe this would cost them their lives. This wasn't a ritual washing of physical contaminants. Water represented the ongoing cleansing of the priests in order for them to offer the sacrifices and minister in the Tabernacle. In a sense it serves as a reminder of the taint of spiritual corruption in the life of humans and the need to be whole for service to God. Cleansing would have to take place before entering the presence of God and before handling the sacrifices representing forgiveness and redemption. As in other aspects of service in the Tabernacle we see the partial nature of the Law. Sin was set aside for a year and not forgiven until Christ offered the final sacrifice. The blood that was sprinkled was not a complete immersion but represented the future application of the perfect blood of Jesus. The cleansing of the priests in the Laver affected their hands and feet which mirrored the partial nature of the Law. In a sense this also pointed to a time when God's plan would be complete and cleansing and forgiveness would be whole, not partial.

We see this represented in the lives of believers today. Those who believe are commanded to be baptized in water, submitting to the authority of God (**Matt 28.18-20, Mk**

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

224 - The Laver

16.15-16, Acts 2.38, Gal 3.27, Rom 6.1-4, 1 Pet 3.21). As in the lives of the Levitical priests, those who are not properly cleansed cannot enter the presence of God. Peter refers to Christians as priests (**1 Pet 2.1-5**) demonstrating a common bond shared with those who served in the Tabernacle. Today we don't minister in a physical Tabernacle, we stand in the presence of God individually in our lives from day to day, and collectively when we assemble to worship the Lord. In this sense saved believers are the Tabernacle of God who stand as cleansed by the blood of Christ when they're immersed in water as an act of faith and submission to the command of God.

The Laver physically represents the single point at which the priests were cleansed and made ready to continue their tasks in the presence of God. Today the scriptures contain the commands that lead us to obey the will of the Father. Likewise, today there's a single point at which we can access the forgiveness of God in his presence. When believers are cleansed, as the priests were, they're ready to serve the Lord as he has directed.

7. What we've learned

Let's review some of the things that we can learn from the Laver and its presence at the Tabernacle.

- a. The Laver represents a continuing thread connecting God's presence and water
- b. The Laver represents a focal point at which the priests were to cleanse themselves
- c. The Laver and water form a connection with the sacrifices that were offered and priesthood
- d. Believers are cleansed with water as they obey the will of God in faith
- e. Without being cleansed in water the priests, or believers today, cannot be in the presence of God
- f. Christians are priests today who minister in the presence of God and as such have been cleansed in water
- g. The Laver represents a single point of cleansing

8. Next

Consecration of the Tabernacle and objects used in daily worship were sanctified for their service. One substance used in this process was **The Holy Anointing Oil** that forms a figurative link with Christ. Join me in the next lesson as we discuss this important physical and symbolic element and its connections in the scriptures.