

Through the Looking Glass

“They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting”. Exodus 38:8

This is a fascinating tidbit of information tucked into the description of the wilderness tabernacle, the place of worship crafted by the Israelites at the direction of God. The bronze basin was placed in the courtyard of the tabernacle, between the altar of burnt offerings and the entrance into the Tent of Meeting. Aaron and his sons, after sacrificing the burnt offerings, were instructed to use it to wash their hands and feet before entering the Tent of Meeting to burn incense in worship. Lawrence Richards says in *The Bible Reader's Companion* that “the washing here represents maintaining personal purity after sacrifice has been offered”. The cross-reference in my Bible directs me to John 13, where Jesus uses another basin filled with water, a much simpler one, to wash the feet of His disciples. Jesus tells Peter, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.” (v. 10). We have been cleansed once for all by the atoning sacrifice of Christ, but we must still continually “wash our feet” before coming into His presence to worship. The priests washed off the stains and the residue from the animal sacrifice that had represented the sin of the people. We wash off the residue of the world, the effects of that sin nature that has been crucified with Christ.

Watching the priests performing this ritual was a group of women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. We don't know what their service was—could it have been cleaning or sweeping? Singing and dancing in worship? Being doorkeepers? One version says “the ministering women who ministered at the door”. These were women who were inside the courtyard—past the altar of sacrifice, past the outer court, past the bronze basin—ministering at the very entrance to the place where the priests met with the Creator God.

Everyone in Israel gave sacrificially in order to build this tabernacle—and they did so with great joy. In Exodus 36:6-7 we read that the people had to be restrained from giving more! Evidently, the women who served the Lord gave up their bronze mirrors in order to make the bronze basin. The King James Version says that they gave their “looking-glasses”. Even all those many centuries ago, in a nomadic tribe of people traveling through harsh desert terrain, women were concerned about how they looked! They must have gotten the mirrors in Egypt, a sophisticated society where women employed make-up, elaborate hairstyles and jewelry to decorate the body. The Israelite women were most likely influenced by the culture that surrounded them, and carried their mirrors with them when they escaped from slavery. But when they had an opportunity to participate in building a place of worship, they gladly sacrificed these vestiges of their life in Egypt. They gave up looking into a “glass” at themselves, and instead turned their eyes to look at the One who had delivered them from bondage. Their priorities had changed. I wonder if the group of women at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting thought about these things as they observed the cleansing ritual of the priests. The bronze basin would have been a daily reminder that the prized possessions which linked them to their former life had been transformed into an object that God had designed; an object of service that facilitated the cleansing of the worshipers of God. And He is a God who continues to transform the things of our past if only we will give them, willingly and without restraint, to Him.