

May 27, 2018 - Ex. 37:1 – 38:20 - Making The Tabernacle, Mirrors in the Laver
Torah reading: Exodus 37:1 – 38:20 - Making The Tabernacle, Mirrors in the Laver
Psalm 70
Haftarah: 1 Kings 8:8-15, 21-22
Isaiah 41:19-27 + 42:21

The readings here are mostly repetitions of the commands God issued for the Tabernacle construction in Exodus 25, but this time recounting their "making." We previously explored the types and symbolism of the Tabernacle and its furniture in foreshadowing Christ, his sacrifice on the cross and the creation of the church, a "spiritual temple" - his body.

Exodus 37:1-5 corresponds to Exodus 25:10-14

Exodus 37:6-9 corresponds to Exodus 25:17-20

Exodus 37:10-16 corresponds to Exodus 25:23-29

Exodus 37:17-24 corresponds to Exodus 25:31-39

Everything was fashioned according to the eternal "pattern shown on the mount" (**Exodus 25:40**).

A Short Review of Tabernacle Symbolism

The Ark of the Covenant represents Christ dwelling with man - and containing the tablets of the Law, signifying His fulfillment of the Law - "Yea, Thy Law is within My heart" (**Psalm 40:8**); Aaron's staff that budded representing His resurrection; The golden pot with manna is Christ as the bread from heaven, the flesh of Jesus Christ which He gave for the life of the world; the lid of the ark serving as a mercy seat for forgiveness of sin. Made from shittim wood (acacia), the ark represents Christ in his earthly incarnation; being overlaid with gold represents his divinity. (Briers from shittim wood also supplied Christ's crown of thorns).

1 John 2:2 - "He is the propitiation (*hilastērion* - mercy seat) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

- The incense altar represented the prayers of the saints and Christ's intercession for us.
- The sacrifices offered on the brazen altar represented the cross, where his perfect sacrifice took place, (and ourselves as living sacrifices with him).
- The lampstand, with its oil and lights, the teaching and enlightening of the Holy Spirit.
- The shew-bread represented that provision for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The colors of the veils and the curtains:

- White = The righteousness of Christ, the garment of the Bride
- Purple = Royalty. The brazen altar was covered in a purple cloth.
- Goat's Hair/Black = The color of the scapegoat on Yom Kippur, representing our sin
- Red/Scarlet = A different picture of our sin "is as scarlet," but so also is Christ's blood, which covers our sin.
- Blue = The heavens, and thus God's throne. The High Priest wore a garment entirely of blue, and the topmost covering of the Tabernacle was blue.

Gold = glory; silver = redemption; bronze/brass = judgment

The sockets supporting the pillars were of silver (redemption), representing Christ's blood separating the Tabernacle and the church from the world.

The different sections of the Tabernacle and the court are described as if it were a human body (shoulders, thighs) with the ark situated in its "inward parts." In other words, it is a diagram of Christ's body.

As said last week, the repetition of all this emphasizes the importance of this sacred structure.

The Gospel was "preached" as the Tabernacle was being made, and every time they erected it and took it down.

Exodus 37:1 - "Bezaleel made..."

Aholiab had no part in the construction of the furniture of the Tabernacle, but only in the coverings, the veil, the curtains, and the priests' dresses. (See **Exodus 38:23**.)

Bezaleel means - "shadow, secret, hidden place of God."

Aholiab - means "a tent, dwelling place for the Father"

Possibly counterparts to the two witnesses in **Revelation 11:1-14**. Bezaleel and Aholiab were "prophesying" by making the objects for the Tabernacle. The two witnesses were to be granted authority to prophesy for 1,260 days (or 42 months, or 3½ years). They might also be a reflection of the two golden pipes and two olive trees/branches of **Zechariah 4**.

The Bronze Laver

The one new bit of information we learn is about the making of the Bronze Laver where the priests would wash their hands and feet.

Exodus 38:8 - "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."

All the other brass that was brought in the offering was used in making the Brazen Altar and the other brass fittings, pins and sockets.

Although in later times there were women who gathered to serve at the door of the tent of meeting (**1 Samuel 2:22**) that doesn't seem to be the case here. They gathered there to bestow their mirrors for the Tabernacle.

Mirrors and self-regard

Jewish tradition has preserved a touching story about these mirrors that reveals a deeper aspect of the importance of women in the congregation, about the love between God and Israel (the Bridegroom and the Bride), and about our mystical union with Him.

It also shows a way that our original spiritual problem that goes all the way back to the Garden - our own self-regard - can be transformed.

The rabbis note that in **Exodus 35:22** - "The men accompanied the women" implies that the women came to make their donations first for the free-will offering, and the men merely followed their lead. Not only that, but because the women had not participated in giving their earrings for the Golden Calf, they didn't need to give anything at all.

The rabbis looked at the Hebrew word in this verse for "assembled" - *tsaba'* - and noted that it was the feminine form with the meaning of "to muster hosts for military service," as well as for the Levites assembled for service in the Tabernacle, and of God assembling his hosts to fight on behalf of Mount Zion (**Isaiah 31:4**).

The Hebrew word for women is not used here, it is assumed because of the unusual feminine form of *tsaba'*.

Here's the tradition:

You find that when Israel were in harsh labor in Egypt, Pharaoh decreed that they should not sleep at home nor have relations with their wives. Said R. Simeon b. Halafta: What did the daughters of Israel do? They would go down to draw water from the river. Whereupon the Holy One Blessed be He prepared small fishes for them inside their jars. They would sell some, cook some and buy with the proceeds wine and go out into the fields and give their husbands to eat there, as it is said, "In all the labor in the field" (Ex. 1:14). After they had eaten and drunk they took the mirrors and looked into them with their husbands, and she would say, "I am more beautiful than you," and he would say, "I am more beautiful than you." In the course of this, they would accustom themselves to desire, and they were fruitful and multiplied, the Holy One Blessed be He forthwith remembering them (i.e. blessing them with issue), as it is stated, "And the children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and multiplied and became exceedingly mighty" (Ex. 1:7)... Through the merit of those same mirrors which they showed their husbands to accustom them to desire in the midst of the harsh labor, they raised up all the hosts, as it is stated, "All the hosts of the lord went out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:41)

When God called for a free-will offering for the Tabernacle, the women said, "What have we to contribute to the offering of the tabernacle?" They came along and brought the mirrors and presented themselves to Moses. When Moses saw the mirrors he was furious with them. He said to Israel, "Take sticks and break the legs of those who brought them. What use are such mirrors?" Said the Holy One Blessed be He to Moses, "Moses! These you despise?! It was these mirror which raised up all these hosts in Egypt! Take them and make out of them the basin and its stand for the priests in which they can purify themselves," as it is stated, "And he made the basin and its stand of bronze out of the mirrors that raised up hosts [הצובאות] " (Ex. 38:8) — those same mirrors which raised up all these hosts.

-- Midrash Tanhuma, Pekudei 9

Another version is even more explicit:

Each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, "I am more beautiful than you." And in this way they aroused their husbands' desire and would be intimate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: "Under the apple tree I aroused you" (Song of Solomon 8:5).

In other words, in the midst of the incredible stress and tribulation imposed by their Egyptian taskmasters, the Jewish wives were able to use the mirrors not only to confirm to themselves their own identity, but by using them to stimulate desire in their husbands, they were able to give their men a way back to recovering their own true selves - not as slaves, but as individuals who through their mutual love and sexual desire became families again, which eventually led to the children of Israel becoming a nation.

Similarly, the rabbis viewed the Song of Solomon as assuredly a picture of God's love for Israel. But without it being in the first place a love poem about sexual desire, the image would contain no meaning.

They even saw this reflected in the Holy of Holies:

R. Kattina said: Whenever Israel came up to the Festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the Cherubim were shown to them, whose bodies were intertwined with one another, and they would be thus addressed: Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman. - Yoma 54a

Of course, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven," as Jesus said (Matthew 22:30), but as a symbol this Jewish story was meant to show the intensity of God's love for Israel.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might" (**Deuteronomy 6:5**). This is not the language of meditation or contemplation, philosophical or mystical. It is the language of passion.

Maimonides writes: "What is the love of God that is befitting? It is to love God with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one's soul shall be knit up with the love of God,

such that it is continually enraptured by it, *like a lovesick individual* whose mind is never free from passion for a particular woman and is enraptured by her at all times ... Even intenser should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him. They should be enraptured by this love at all times." (Laws of Repentance, 10:5)

I.e. eros informs our understanding of agape love. The Kabbala says this kind of spiritual love is beyond our ability to understand or speak about. And this idea merges perfectly with the warning in the New Testament about heretics "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:3).

"Forbidding to marry" would effectively erase our ability to appreciate this kind of love between Christ and his Bride.

The Yedid Nefesh

A later medieval example of this kind of love is reflected in the Yedid Nefesh (Beloved of the Soul), described as a "daring" song sung by Jews to greet the Sabbath, which arrives "like a queen." The first letters of each of the four verses make up the four letter name of God, known in English as the tetragrammaton.

"Majestic, Beautiful, Radiance of the universe, my soul pines [lit: is sick for] for your love. Please, O God, heal her now by showing her the pleasantness of Your radiance; then she will be strengthened and healed, and eternal gladness will be hers.

"...Please, my Beloved, reveal Yourself and spread upon me the shelter of Your peace; illuminate the Earth with Your glory, that we may rejoice and be glad with You; hasten, show love, for the time has come, and show us grace as in days of old."

This is all a call for us to be able to "walk on our high places" where we formerly worshipped idols. Self, and by extension our sexuality, can be strongholds for sin and self-seeking. But they can also be transformed by the renewing of our minds through repentance.

Jumping to a Higher Orbit

Melito of Sardis in "On Pascha" explained that the Old Testament Law and the sacrificial system relinquish their significance to the eternal reality of Christ, for which they served only as a shadow.

When an electron jumps to a higher level orbit, it releases a photon of light. The same can be said to happen to spiritual types.

Through the injection of "energy" from God, the object of a mirror - which starts off as a vain utensil for self-admiration - was at first employed by God to offset the Egyptian campaign to eliminate Israel's population growth. Spiritual light was released. Now, through another injection of energy by way of God's call for a free-will offering, the

mirror becomes part of the Bronze Laver, by which the priests cleanse their hands and feet (i.e. their walk and actions) for service in the Tabernacle, after examining them thoroughly for dirt or defilement. So even more light is shed to illuminate a type of Christ.

Narcissus

The Laver itself was retained and used in Solomon's Temple. The large basin is described in the Talmud as having a decoration around its brim of narcissus flowers. This recalls the Greek myth of Narcissus, who looked into a pond, saw his reflection and became so enamored that he couldn't leave.

Although there is probably no direct connection, this myth is instructive.

Ovid relates the tale in his work *Metamorphoses*, 'Narcissus and Echo': Stopping weary at a forest pool, "while he drinks, he is smitten by the sight of the beautiful form he sees. He loves an unsubstantial hope and thinks that is substance which is only shadow. ... He drooped his weary head on the green grass and death sealed the eyes that marveled at their master's beauty. In place of his body they find a flower, its yellow center girt with white petals." i.e. the narcissus flower.

Self love, in other words, bears no fruit and leads to death.

There is a rabbinical tale similar to the Narcissus myth in the earliest versions of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud compilations about a handsome Nazirite:

Simeon the Just said: Only once in my life have I eaten of the trespass-offering brought by a defiled tear. On one occasion a nazir came from the South country, and I saw that he had beautiful eyes, was of handsome appearance, and with thick locks of hair symmetrically arranged. Said I to him: "My son, what [reason] didst thou see to destroy this beautiful hair of thine?" He replied: "I was a shepherd for my father in my town. [Once] I went to draw water from a well, gazed upon my reflection in the water, whereupon my evil desires rushed upon me and sought to drive me from the world. But I said unto it: 'Wretch! Why dost thou vaunt thyself in a world that is not thine, with one who is destined to become worms and dust? I swear that I will shave thee off for the sake of Heaven.'" I immediately arose and kissed his head, saying: "My son, may there be many nazirites such as thou in Israel!" - *Nedarim 9b*

Mirror as Vision

The Hebrew word for mirror is *mar'âh* - the female version of a root that means "view (the act of seeing)." It only appears about 10 times in the Old Testament. Primarily this female version is used to mean a vision from God. Only in this single passage from Exodus is it used also to mean a mirror.

The male version of the word - *mar'eh* - is much more common and usually means "appearance," something seen, especially something positive - handsome, beautiful or

comely.

Examples: "Rachel was beautiful and well favored." (**Genesis 29:17**);

"Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored." (**Genesis 39:6**);

Song of Solomon 2:14 - "...thy countenance is comely."

Even as a positive appearance of leprosy in someone who is declared clean (**Leviticus 13:34**).

1 Samuel 16:7 - "...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

Isaiah 53:2 - "...there is no beauty (*mar'eh*) that we should desire him."

Mirrors were used for divination in the ancient world. The Romans called theirs *specularii*. Turning a mirror to the stars to divine messages about the future is seen in ancient Persia. Pythagoras, according to legend, tipped a mirror at the moon to read the future. The ancients wondered if the mirrored reflection was the true soul of the person.

Socrates advised young men to look at their faces and, if the reflection was a handsome one, to focus their life on keeping their souls pure. Being able to recognize one's reflection in a mirror has become one test for human self-consciousness.

Genesis 46:2 - "And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night..." as well as visions experienced by Daniel and Ezekiel (**Daniel 10:7-16**; **Ezekiel 8:3, 40:2**)

When the mirror becomes transformed into the Laver, an interesting thing happens:

Daniel 10:8 - "Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision (*mar'âh*) and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength."

The looking glass/ vision reflects our "corruption" and requires the cleansing power of the Laver - another picture of Christ.

But in a state of repentance and filled with the resurrection power of Christ, love and light overwhelm us.

2 Corinthians 13:5 - "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

James 1:23-25 - "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

1 Corinthians 13:12 - "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:

now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

2 Corinthians 3:18 - "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

To make peace between a man and his wife

Rashi says the water used in the Sotah test for a woman suspected of adultery comes from the Laver.

From these [the mirrors], the washstand was made, because its purpose was to make peace between a man and his wife. [How so?] By giving a drink from the water that was in it [the washstand] to [a woman] whose husband had warned her [not to stay in private with a certain man] and she secluded herself [with him anyway. The water would test her and either destroy her or prove her innocence. See Numbers 5:11-31]. You should know that they were actually mirrors, because it is said: "The copper of the waving was seventy talents... From that he made..." (Exodus 38:29, 30), but the washstand and its base were not mentioned there [among the things produced from the seventy talents. Thus,] you have learned that the copper of the washstand was not of the copper of the waving. So did Rabbi Tanchuma expound [on the matter] (Midrash Tanchuma, Pekudei 9; Num Rabbah 9:14). And so did Onkelos render: בְּמִחְזֵית נְשִׂיאָא ["the mirrors of the women"], which is the Aramaic translation of מְרָאוֹת, mirrors in French. So we find in Isaiah (3:23) וְהָגְלִינֵיהֶם (sic), which we render: וּמִחְזֵיתָא, and the mirrors.

In this version, a contrast is set up between the ritual of the Sotah, testing of the woman suspected of adultery, which draws on "pure water" (**Numbers 5:7**), and the mirrors of the laver, which also contain pure water, and testify to the purity of the Righteous Women who left Egypt.

What do you see?

The question for all of us posed by this passage in Exodus is, "Have my mirrors been transformed?"