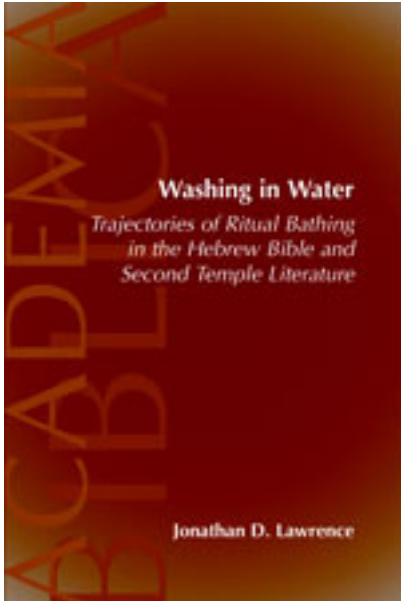


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**Lawrence, Jonathan D.**

***Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature***

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In *Washing in Water*, Jonathan Lawrence reconstructs the development of ritual bathing in ancient Judaism by surveying archeological investigations of *miqva'ot* (ritual baths) as well as references to bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature.

Lawrence begins by carefully distinguishing literary references to bathing or laundering from references to purification and isolates the small number that mention purification *by* bathing or laundering. He tabulates the results in extensive appendices. In the Hebrew Bible, he discovers that mention of purification through washing is largely limited to the Pentateuch (mainly P). Late Second Temple literature, however, presents ritual bathing as commonly practiced both in and around the Jerusalem temple as well as quite apart from any temple ceremonies. Philo and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls also reveal an interest in interpreting and extending the practice of ritual bathing by deducing principles by analogy with the Torah's explicit prescriptions. Contrary to later rabbinic discussions, however, Lawrence finds that Second Temple literature reflects minimal requirements for what can constitute a proper *miqveh*, simply enough water to bathe in. He argues, therefore, that any sufficiently deep pool from the period should be considered a potential *miqveh*.

With that definition in mind, the archeological evidence for *miqva'ot* shows uneven distribution in time and space. Lawrence not only describes the evidence but also presents detailed charts and photographs in his appendices. He concludes: "*Miqva'ot* first appear in the second century B.C.E. at sites connected to the Hasmonean rule of Judea. For the rest of the Second Temple period, they are concentrated in Jerusalem and surrounding Judea, with only a few in the Galilee and Transjordan. After 70 C.E., very few *miqva'ot* are left and most of these are located in the Galilee" (190).

Thus Lawrence traces the concern with ritual washing from the J source's description of laundering clothes (in Exod 19) through P's regulations (especially in Lev 12–15) to late Second Temple discussions and physical remains. He also notes the absence of interest in the subject in much of the biblical literature dating from both before and after the exile. He concludes, "We can point to two major steps in the development of ritual bathing—the composition of the Priestly source, perhaps in response to the exile, and the Maccabean Revolt which allowed new uses of ritual bathing to develop" (199).

Lawrence makes a major contribution to the subject of ritual bathing by bringing together the archeological and literary evidence and deriving from the combination a historical description of developments in ritual practice. The inherent difficulty in such a project, however, involves how to interpret literary silence. Lawrence notes that many commentators have assumed that the Deuteronomist's and the Chronicler's references to purification imply washing practices even though they do not make that explicit. He, on the other hand, takes these books' omissions as evidence for their ignorance of the practice. Comparative study of textual references to ritual behaviors recommends greater caution in mounting arguments from silence. Authors both ancient and modern tend to refer to rituals only in so far as doing so serves their rhetorical purposes, and they describe only the elements of a ritual that have bearing on that purpose. As a result, virtually nothing can be concluded from a text's omission of a ritual practice except that the author(s) were uninterested in it. There is no way to tell whether or not that lack of interest was due to their ignorance of the practice. Thus the conclusion that P introduced new regulations for washing should not be based simply upon the silence of other texts.

Nevertheless, Lawrence has advanced the field by employing both literary references and archaeological artifacts to propose a chronology for the development of washing rituals. Future investigations will no doubt clarify and nuance his proposal.