



A MIKVEH

This ritual bath, with its steps and plastered sides, is located next to the broad staircase leading to the Temple Mount. This *mikveh* (pl. *mikvoth*) is one of the many discovered here. Jewish law required that worshipers be ritually clean before entering God's presence. That requirement prevented certain people (like lepers) or people at certain times (women just after childbirth) from entering at all (Num. 5:1—3; Lev. 15). Others would enter a *mikveh* and wash to indicate their ritual purity before entering the Temple grounds. Surely, Jesus and his disciples used installations like this one.

A mikveh had to be watertight so no impurity could enter it. It had to contain a minimum amount of water (about 200 gallons), which had to be “living”—water that flowed freely into the chamber. This practice of washing before entering the Temple developed from the large bronze Sea in the First Temple of Solomon.

The *mikveh* shown here was used for common people. There were special *mikvoth* on the Temple Mount for priests, the high priest, and even lepers. Some scholars have suggested that the 3,000 converts who were baptized on the Christian fulfillment of Shavuot (Pentecost) probably were baptized in *mikvoth*. Since the event must have happened near the Temple (it was 9:00 in the morning on a holy day, the time when prayers and worship began), the many *mikvoth* near the stairs, including this one, are possible candidates.