

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Numbers

Lesson #12, Chapter 19

The Red Heifer in Old Testament Law

There were many elements to the Old Testament law and the tabernacle worship. One important element - a red heifer - was needed to help accomplish purification from sin. In particular, the ashes of a red heifer were required.

The red heifer was a reddish-brown cow about two years old. It was to be without defect and to never have a yoke upon it. The sacrifice of the red heifer was unique in the law in that it used a female animal, was sacrificed away from the tabernacle, and was the only sacrifice where the color of the animal was specified.

The ashes of the red heifer were stored in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp of Israel. The ashes were added to spring water to make the water of purification for cleansing from sin.

According to Jewish tradition, a total of nine red heifers have been sacrificed since the days of Moses. Since the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., there have been no red heifers sacrificed - and those orthodox Jews who wish to resume Temple worship today are looking for a red heifer that meets the standard to be an acceptable sacrifice so the water of purification can be made.

Numbers Chapter 19 - The Ashes of the Red Heifer and Purification

Today's chapter stands as a great picture of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many Christians have never heard of the ashes of the red heifer from Numbers 19, but in this story we can find many treasures of truth. The ashes of the red heifer are referred to in the New Testament:

Hebrews 9:11 (NLT) So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. **12** With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

13 Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. **14** Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds [KJV: dead works] so that we can worship the living God. For...Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. **15** That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.

When we study the meaning of the ashes of the red heifer, we must remember that sin is the transgressing of the law of God (1 John 3:4), and the penalty for sin is death.

James 1:14 (NKJV) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. **15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Romans 6:23 (KJV) For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the books of Moses, God commanded that His people must be ceremonially clean or they would be put out of the camp (Lev. 13:46). There were many ways that a person could become ceremonially unclean, and God had methods that they were to employ to become clean and acceptable once again.

An unclean person had to be cleansed before he was allowed to live in the camp once again - and participate in the festivals of Jehovah or bring sacrifices and offerings to the Tabernacle. We will read that the ashes of the red heifer mixed with spring water brought purification from uncleanness.

Today, modern orthodox Jews that desire to restore Temple worship are very interested in obtaining an acceptable red heifer. The ashes of a red heifer are necessary to make the water of purification so they can someday build the Third Temple in Jerusalem.

But for Christians, we see the red heifer as a picture or type of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's begin studying the red heifer and make comparisons.

Numbers 19:1 (NKJV) Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, **2** "This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord has commanded, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come.

The ancient Israelites were to bring a heifer to Moses and Aaron. It was to be completely red without blemishes (no defects that could be detected by the human eye). The heifer was never to have had a yoke placed upon its neck.

We know from the passage in Hebrews on the previous page that the heifer was a picture of Jesus Christ. In ancient Israel, the ashes of the red heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity after touching a dead body, but in this New Testament age, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ cleanses us from "dead works."

How does Jesus compare to the red heifer? He was "one of a kind," and without blemish or sin. There is no one like Jesus. Jesus was sinless. The yoke of sin and bondage had not come upon Him. He had a single purpose to His life.

John 10:17 (NKJV) "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. **18** No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

The red heifer was thoroughly examined to be sure that he was pure and without blemish. Regarding Jesus, Pilate said, *"I find no fault in Him at all"* (John 18:38).

Numbers 19:3 You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him; **4** and Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger,

and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting. **5** Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned.

Eleazar was to take the red heifer outside the camp to be slaughtered and burned.

Hebrews 13:12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. **13** Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

Jesus gave Himself entirely to the cause of delivering us from sin and death. He was crucified "*outside the camp*" as an offering for both Jew and Gentile, for His cross was outside the city of Jerusalem, away from the Temple. Jesus was not only a sacrifice for the Jewish people, but He was a sacrifice for the whole world as is pictured by His crucifixion outside the city.

Numbers 19:6 And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer.

Cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet were cast into the fire with the sacrifice. Cedar wood is not attacked by insect pests. The great cedar trees of the Middle East can have a lifespan of over 2000 years. Cedar was chosen as the wood to build Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Cedar wood pictures incorruption.

Hyssop is an herb plant that grows up to three feet tall. Its stalks are bunched together and used somewhat like a paintbrush in God's religious rites. For instance, on the first Passover in Egypt, each Israelite family was commanded to kill a lamb, dip a bunch of hyssop in its blood, and apply the blood to the doorposts of the house. This would keep away the death angel. Hyssop pictures cleansing.

The scarlet wool or yarn speaks of blood. One Bible commentator states that the scarlet also speaks of military and royal authority.

These three elements that were to be put on the fire with the red heifer were mentioned previously in Leviticus 14 in connection with deliverance from death and purification from uncleanness.

When we think of the cross of Calvary, we should not think of it as a murder or an execution. When Jesus died on the cross, *it was a sacrifice to God*. Jesus' death on Calvary was foretold in Old Testament types and pictures - as we have seen as we have studied the books of Moses.

Let's read about the sacrifice of Jesus:

Matthew 27:1 When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. **2** And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor... **11** Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Jesus said to him, "It is as you say." **12** And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.

13 Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" **14** But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly...

22 Pilate said to them [the multitude], "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!"

23 Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?"

But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."

25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

John 19:17 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, **18** where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. **19** Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

20 Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

21 Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'""

22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." . . .

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" **29** Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. **30** So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

...**34** But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out...

38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus.

Now, back to the story of the red heifer:

Numbers 19:7 Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening. **8** And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening. **9** Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin. **10** And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them.

It is amazing that something that was for purification and cleansing could make everyone who touched it unclean. The priest who led the heifer out was unclean. The man who burned it was unclean. The man who gathered up the

ashes was unclean. We are reminded of the groups of people involved in the crucifixion of our Lord - the priests who plotted against him and delivered him to Pilate, the Romans who actually crucified Him, and even Joseph of Arimathea who gathered up the body of Jesus for burial. We all are sinners. We all need the Lord Jesus.

And now we come to the stated purpose of the ashes of the red heifer:

Numbers 19:11 'He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. 12 He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. **13** Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.

14 'This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; **15** and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. **16** Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

The Israelite was ceremonially unclean if he came into contact with a dead body. He was then separated from the camp of Israel. Only the water of purification sprinkled on him could make him clean, and even then, it was a weeklong process.

Death is the end result of sin. It is cause and effect - *"...when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death"* (James 1:15). *"The wages of sin is death..."* (Romans 6:23). While the waters of purification cleansed the Israelite from defilement, our opening Scripture states that the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse our conscience from *"dead works"* (Hebrews 9:14). What are dead works? They are works that don't bring about any spiritual result. They are sinful actions that separate us from God. They are attempts to gain heaven by our own righteousness. They are wasted, futile actions that don't honor God, ourselves, or others. We need cleansing from things that defile us so we can approach God and participate in holy activity. What a blessing to have our consciences cleansed! The person who is cleansed can now boldly approach the throne of God!

When a person was defiled by contact with a dead body, he was to be sprinkled with the water of purification on the third day and on the seventh day. It was going to take awhile, but cleansing would come.

For the Christian, we can easily see the symbolism of the third day:

Matthew 20:18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, **19** and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

On the third day, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead to live forevermore.

But what about the seventh day? Seven in the Bible is the number of completion. God created the world in six days, and He rested on the seventh, being done with creation.

The seventh dispensation of time, known as the millennium will be ushered in by the rapture of the church and the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. This will be a time when death will finally be beaten - the living and dead saints of God will all receive their immortal bodies. Death will be conquered!

1 Corinthians 15:51 (NLT) But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! **52** It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. **53** For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

54 Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

"Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

56 For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. **57** But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some say that the body is not important - only the soul of a man. But God created man as a body and spirit. Jesus Christ came as a man and He gave His body as the sacrifice for sin. The body is extremely important! The crowning point of history is when Jesus Christ gives to all who are righteous in Him a new body, an immortal body - one that will never die. The soul is not destined to be without its body for eternity. Transforming the mortal body into the immortal body is the business of the rapture.

What happens to a person when he dies? Death brings separation. We know that the soul is separated from the body, for we can still see the lifeless body after a person dies. That body is very carefully attended and reverently placed in the ground to await that great day coming. In the ground, it will see corruption. But what happens to the soul? Scripture gives us very little information regarding that - and no doubt God intended for us to know very little. The Old Testament says almost nothing about it, and the New Testament says very little. Paul said that, "*to be absent from the body*" is "*to be present with the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:8). What happens there, we do not really know. How active is the soul while waiting on the rapture? We don't know much.

But we must never lose sight of the fact that the rapture of the church is the reuniting of the righteous dead with their new, immortal body, and for those who are still alive, a transformation to an immortal body when death is completely conquered.

So in the rite of purification with the ashes of the red heifer, the person was to be sprinkled on the third day and on the seventh day. The third day speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the seventh day speaks of the resurrection of the saints of God. In both cases, death is conquered.

Numbers 19:17 'And for an unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. **18** A clean person shall take

hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. **19** The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.

20 'But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean. **21** It shall be a perpetual statute for them. He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening. **22** Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening.'"

Those who touch the water of purification are made unclean, but whoever the water of purification touches, that person is made clean.

Much is said in the Law about the clean and the unclean. Uncleaness is easily caused, but its removal takes time. Becoming unclean from contact with death is easily done, but the remedy is a week-long process.

Sin not only spoils life while it lasts, but it often brings an early end to life. Death mocks life. Death does not really come from accident, disease, or old age. Death comes because we are all sinners. Death can only be conquered by conquering sin. Jesus destroyed the power of death by destroying the power of sin.

Hebrews 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Psalms 51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

John 13:8b Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Water Baptism Cleanses Us from Sin

In the Old Testament, the ashes of a red heifer placed in water brought purification from sin. In this New Testament age, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ cleanses us from sin.

Acts 22:16 (NLT) What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.

Acts 2:38 (NKJV) Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? **4** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Mark 16:16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.