

Numbers 19-21 • Chapter Study

INTRO

We ended last week with ch18 & a list of rules for the Levites after the Levite Korah's rebellion.

Ch19

Ch19 is known as the **Red Heifer ch** because it is a **detailed** description of an **elaborate** purification ritual involving a red cow.

We'll read the first vs so you can get a feel for how detailed these instructions are.

¹ 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. 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 7 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. ⁶ And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast *them* into the midst of the fire burning the heifer.

A **heifer** is a young female cow that's not borne a calf.

Heifers come in many cowy-colors; black, white, brown, tan, red.

Their coats are usually spotted or mottled.

A heifer that's all **one color** was rare // An **all-red** heifer was **really** rare.

And one that bore no blemish nor defect, by which **modern** Jews understand that to mean, not only that its skin & limbs were intact, but that it had **no hairs** of any color other than red – meant this was an **extremely rare animal**.

Once identified, this heifer was taken OUTSIDE the camp & sacrificed in the usual way.

Then, some of its blood **was taken back** to the tabernacle & sprinkled on the altar.

Eleazar, Aaron's son who was to officiate, is told in v4 to sprinkle the blood 7 times in front of the tabernacle.

That's where the altar of burnt offering stood and is understood as the place where the blood was to be placed, as per the many previous instructions for sacrifices in Leviticus.

But this heifer **wasn't bled completely** as the other sacrifices were.

And it wasn't burnt on the altar in the tabernacle court. It was burnt outside the camp **WITH** most of its blood.

That's a departure from other sacrifices.

So is the additional items that were to be added to the fire as the heifer was burnt.

Cedar wood, hyssop, and red cloth.

The last time we encountered these 3 items was in the cleansing ritual for healed lepers.

They each had a special significance in purification.

Cedar is a wood highly resistant to decay & ruin by insects.

Because of this and the fact cedar is a tree that doesn't produce large groves, the wood is regarded as precious.

Early on in Christian tradition, Jesus cross was said to be made of cedar.

The cross beam He bore and was nailed to having been re-purposed from other crucifixions.

Hyssop is a small, bushy plant of the mint family.

It's leaves have a bitter minty flavor & are used in both cooking & medicine.

It makes a good, ready brush and was used to place the blood of the PO lamb on the doorposts & lintel of the Jewish homes.

It was used by priests in the ritual to cleanse healed-lepers.

They dipped it in blood, then shook it onto the leper 7 times as they pronounced him/her officially clean.

Jesus was offered drink from a hyssop branch while on the cross.

Scarlet, also points to the Cross where Jesus' blood was shed

Not only to atone for our sins, but to **officially** declare & announce us as cleansed, healed,

& restored to fellowship with our Holy God.

Note that *it's just "scarlet;"* = A color.

There's no mention of cloth or the fabric that *was* red.

The material is immaterial to the ***point*** of the ritual.

You see – this entire procedure with the red heifer is to make a special kind of holy water that's used to purify the tabernacle, the priests and anything else used in the holy service of God.

In vs7-10, the priest adds the cedar, hyssop & scarlet to the fire consuming the entire red heifer, blood & all – outside the camp.

Then, after the priest and those assisting him have washed themselves and their clothes, they go back to the place where the ashes of the heifer are and scoop them all into a special container that is kept in a special place outside the camp.

Then, anytime there's a need for ritual purification, a priest goes to that special place with some water, and sprinkles a tiny bit of ash onto the water.

The ash is what gives it its purifying power.

This elaborate & mysterious ritual all points to Jesus.

Like the red heifer, He's rare, unique; truly the "One-of-a-Kind" that has only One.

He was crucified outside the camp; outside the walls of Jerusalem.

He offered Himself up completely, on a cross that was in all likelihood cedar.

He was offered drink on a branch of hyssop.

And it's His death that purifies us before God.

Vs11-22 are instructions on how to apply the water of purification to different conditions of uncleanness.

Now: Even though only a tiny portion of ashes were used to make the purification water, it was inevitable they'd eventually run out.

So the ritual of the red heifer had to be renewed.

Surrounding the sacred text of Holy Scripture, Jews have a large body of oral tradition called the ***Mishna***.

They eventually committed it to writing and that became the first part of the Talmud.

The Mishna says up thru the time of Herod's Temple, a total of 9 red heifers were used to make ashes.

After the 1st in the time of Moses, the 2nd was made by Ezra when the temple was rebuilt after its destruction by the Babylonians.

After that, 7 more heifers were used.

Many religious Jews ***today*** want to see the temple rebuilt & the priestly service renewed.

There are organizations seeking to do all that.

The Temple Institute is one of them.

But the temple can't be used in the service of God, nor can the high priest begin his service unless it's all purified by this special holy water of purification.

Materials to build the temple have been secured and warehoused in Israel.

Elaborate plans have been drawn up.

The high priest's & assistant priests uniforms have been made.

Most of the furniture for the temple service has been fashioned.

The tools & utensils needed for the sacrifices have been cast.

There's been a laborious search to find capable candidates for the priesthood and special schools have been set up to train them.

So there's been an effort to produce a new red heifer.

The great 12th C Jewish rabbi & scholar ***Maimonides*** proclaimed, "The 10th red heifer will be accomplished by the king, the Messiah."

Maimonides was recounting an ancient tradition that said the 10th red heifer arrives in Messianic era.

According to Jewish law, for a cow to be accepted as a worthy aspirant to the red heifer it has to be without blemish, has never been put to work and is completely red.

The young cow must be kept under strict care until it reaches 3 yrs.

During that time, no 1 may lean on, ride, or put a piece of cloth on it bcuz that would make it a beast of burden.

As it matures, it's carefully watched to make sure no 2 hairs of any color other than red appear.

Recent attempts to raise a red heifer in Israel got close, but in 2000, 1 promising candidate grew 2 black

hairs & was disqualified.

In 2014, a red heifer was born to a Jewish farmer in the US.

I've not seen an update on it lately.

Once the cow turns 4, it's too old to serve as THE red heifer.

Ch20

As we come to Num20, the yrs of wandering thru the wilderness are winding down

¹ Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the 1st month, & the people stayed in Kadesh; & Miriam died there & was buried there.

This is the same place they were 38 yrs before.

It's the S'n border of Canaan.

They arrived there about a yr&½ after leaving Egypt.

They'd sent a dozen spies into Canaan on reconnaissance.

Their report freaked out the people who balked at going in.

So they were doomed to wander in the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula until the entire gen of adults who'd been slaves in Egypt died off.

[MAP discourse = 2 maps]

Here they are, back at Kadesh, after having *literally* wandered in circles for nearly 4 decades.

Which is what happens when we balk at following God.

When we dig in our heels & refuse to go where the Spirit is leading us in our spiritual journey.

When we're confronted with doubts & fears that stifle their progress in Christ.

We end up wandering in frustrating circles until all that dies within us that's of the old man; the person we were before we were born again.

Check it out: For 38 yrs they followed the pillar of smoke & fire that signaled God's presence.

HE wanted them to enter Canaan, but when they refused, He led them ***In circles!***

And every circuit on Sinai's merry-go-round saw more & more of the faithless die off.

Oh that we might learn from this! If we balk at following God, & dig in our spiritual heels & say, "No!" to His plan for us, God ***will*** honor that foolish choice.

He will not leave, nor forsake us.

But He will engineer our course so the rebel in us dies.

If you're going in circles, making little progress in life, maybe you've balked at following the Spirit into what seemed a scary new place.

Fears & doubts rose up like a brick wall & instead of pushing thru, you backed away.

God's been at work to bring you to the place where that which hindered you before is laid down.

Just as Israel found itself ***back at Kadesh***, God will bring you back. When He does, press in.

The 38 yrs Israel spent in the wilderness are covered in only 5 chs; 15-19.

3 of those chs deal with religious rules.

So really, only 2 chs are given to those 38 yrs ***Because nothing of spiritual consequence happened!***

They were a waste.

Oh sure, there was all kinds of ***news*** from an ***earthly perspective***.

The Israeli Times was full, every day of articles about this & that in the camp.

But from the divine perspective ***nothing*** much happened.

They were killing time as time killed off that which kept them from all God had for them.

There at Kadesh, Moses' elder sister Miriam died & was buried. The elder generation is expiring.

² Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses & Aaron. Wait! Haven't we been here before?

This isn't the 1st time they were without water.

But God had always provided for them; ***for 38 yrs*** – in territory that's notorious for lacking water.

There are small watering holes; but nothing sufficient for a group Israel's size. [water bottle]

So, when faced with a need for water and in light of God's past faithful provision what ought they have done?

Asked God to provide.

³ And the people contended with Moses & spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the

Lord! ⁴ Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we & our animals should die here? ⁵ And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.”

The apple, as they say, doesn't fall far from the tree.

Though this is mostly the generation of those born & raised in the wilderness, they've learned the sad habit of complaining from their parents.

They even use the same words.

⁶ So Moses & Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, & they fell on their faces. & the glory of the Lord appeared to them.

M&A do what the people ought to have done; **take their need to God**.

When **you're** tempted to complain about this or that, to whine, lament, grouse, criticize STOP, get on your face & talk to God.

⁷ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸ “Take the rod;

What rod? The one we looked at last week Aaron's that had budded, settling once & for all who God had picked to lead Israel.

You see, that's a large part of the complaint the people have here: That M&A have led them into disaster!

It's been decades since the events of ch17 when God made it clear who was to lead Israel.

They needed to be reminded.

Aaron's rod with its branches, twigs, flowers & almonds reminded them God set His approval on M&A.

That rod was a **memorial** to their divine authority & call.

⁷ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸ “Take the rod; you & your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, & it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, & give drink to the congregation & their animals.”

Our translation misses something crucial in the language God used here.

He was emphatic & clear when He told them to **SPEAK** to the rock.

When they did, enough water would flow to satisfy the thirst & need of every person and beast.

The avg 150 lb person should drink 3 qts of water/day.

That's 2¼ million gals of water!

45,000 - 50 gal. drums.

If a truck can carry 30 such drums, it would take 1,500 trucks.

If you put those trucks on the FWY & give each 30 ft distance btwn them, the convoy would stretch 8 miles.

That's a **lot of water**.

⁹ So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him.

The rod was in the ark of the covenant. So this proves that's the rod we're talking about here; Aaron's that had budded.

¹⁰ And Moses & Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; & he said TO THEM,

Wait a minute, what had God told Moses to speak **to**? The rock. // Why's he is speaking to **the people**.

“Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”

We've not really seen Moses speak this way before.

Even when dealing with Korah & his rebel companions, he was more humble and meek.

And in the past whenever he was accused & criticized, he's took it to the Lord.

But his frustration & anger now shows thru.

We can understand it.

After all, this is the **new** generation.

And they're back at the same place the whole thing went S 4 decades before and doomed them to the wilderness.

Moses is probably thinking, “Great! Here we go again.”

He's **had** it & his anger comes out in the words – “**Hear now, you rebels!**”

But then he says something that doesn't sound at all like him, “**Must we bring water for you out of this rock?**”

Moe takes an uncharacteristic place for himself in making himself a **partner** in the miracle.

Anger is dangerous because it moves us to say & do things we ought not.

Eph 4:26 says, “Be angry, but do not sin.”

As an emotion, anger isn’t wrong, but it can move us to wrong.

When angry, we need to ask “Why?”

If we’re angry simply because we didn’t get our way, the cause of most anger, we ought to simply repent for being selfish.

But if our anger is righteous, even then we must make sure we do not lose self-control but that the anger fuels a righteous response.

We see this in Jesus in John 2 where He cleared the temple. [Elaborate – made whip]

Moses was ticked & it came out in hostile words. **“Hear now, you rebels!”**

It also confused his own sense of self-importance because anger has this trait – it makes us feel righteous & justified in **why** we’re angry. **“Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”**

But the **real tragedy** is what Moses’ anger moved him, not to say, but to **DO** . . .

¹¹ Then Moses lifted his hand & struck the rock twice with his rod; & water came out abundantly, & the congregation & their animals drank.

God never told Moses to **strike** the rock.

The instructions were quite clear; he was to **speak** to it.

Moses struck the rock with Aaron’s rod!

What happened to those branches, blossoms & fruit?

They were broken, torn, ripped away.

A precious memorial to God’s miraculous power & M&A’s calling was shredded.

And in that shredding, their call ended.

¹² Then the Lord spoke to Moses & Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow [set Me apart] Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”

That seems an awfully harsh judgment God metes out on Moses here.

He’s faithful served God for 40 yrs in the face of incredibly trying circumstances.

But now he won’t be allowed to complete the mission & take Israel into the PL.

All because, as God says in v12 - **“You did not believe Me.”**

Is that fair? Yes, **Totally!**

Moses’ error is serious precisely because He knew what God told him to do, & he did **something else**.

If there was **anyone** who ought to have known to obey God, it was Moe.

To whom much is given, much is required. [Luke 12:48]

God says M&A had not “hallowed” God before the people.

God **wasn’t angry** with the people.

Their need for water was real & though it wasn’t presented in the right way, God wasn’t angry with them, at least not in the way M&A made them believe.

Moses’ words were harsh condemnations: “You **rebels!**”

The Hebrew word for “rebel” speaks of a bitter, obstinate, nay-saying, contentious, imbecilic moron.

So, yeah: Moses pretty much threw every insult he could at the people he was supposed to be leading.

And, with Aaron’s rod in hand, he’s standing in front of them all **as God’s representative**.

He’s in effect saying **that’s God’s attitude toward them**.

M&A were charged with representing God to the nation; Moses, politically. Aaron, religiously.

But they misrepresented God in a most grievous manner.

For this, they **forfeited** their ability to lead.

There are **certain sins** a leader may commit which remove him/her from **leadership**.

They may be able to serve in some **other** capacity, but not in the role they held before.

God intended to use this whole incident at Kadesh as **yet another pointer to Jesus**.

He handed Moses his script: He was to **speak** to the rock, & abundant water would flow.

Don’t forget that back in Exo 17, Moses had already struck the rock at Mt. Sinai & water flowed.

Now at Kadesh, the rock having **ALREADY BEEN STRUCK**, all that was needed was to **speak** & water would flow.

In 1Cor10, the Apostle Paul says God intended **the rock** to be a picture of Christ.

He was smitten at the cross for our sins.

The spear went into His side & blood & water flowed, by which we're made children of God. But now that Christ **has been** struck, His death atones **once for all**, as it says in Heb7:27.

Now, all we need do is **speak** to the Rock of our Salvation & God's Spirit is poured out on us.

As Eph 5 says, we are to be **constantly filled** with the HS.

In John 7, Jesus stood in the temple, telling the crowd that gathered to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles -

³⁷ If any1 thirsts, let him come to Me & drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Then John added . . .

³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

It may be you've come to the **smitten rock**, the **Saving Christ**; you believe Jesus died for your sins.

But have you **spoken to the Rock**, to the **Baptizing Christ**, & asked Him to fully satisfy you with His living water, & to cause to come forth **from you** a river of life to deluge others with love, peace, & joy?

God intended Kadesh to be a picture of all this.

Bbut Moses threw a wrench in the works by angrily striking the rock.

¹³ This *was* the water of Meribah, [**Contention**] because the children of Israel contended with the Lord, & He was hallowed among them.

The revocation of M&A's call was a powerful lesson for the rest of Israel.

Moses failed to hallow God, but God was hallowed none the less.

We may not obey God. In fact, we often don't.

That will in no way stall or thwart God's plan.

Edom Closed 20:14-21

¹⁴ Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, ¹⁵ how our fathers went down to Egypt, & we dwelt in Egypt a long time, & the Egyptians afflicted us & our fathers. ¹⁶ When we cried out to the Lord, He heard our voice & sent the Angel & brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. ¹⁷ Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.'"

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's fraternal twin brother.

Esau's nickname was **Edom**, Red since he had red-hair.

It's been abt 450 years since Jacob's family of 70 went to Egypt.

And now they're on their way home, back to the ancestral digs in Canaan.

The pillar of God's presence is not leading them to enter Canaan from the S this time.

They will enter from the E, across the Jordan river.

But straddling their path is Edom.

There was a mjr highway of the ancient world that passed thru this area called "The King's Highway" – El Camino Real.

Moses sent messengers to the King of Edom for **permission** to pass thru his region, saying they'd be careful not to forage or do any damage.

Now: Why ask permission if God was leading them?

The Edomites were relatives & it was the respectful thing to do.

There's a good chance, God told him to.

¹⁸ Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my *land*, lest I come out against you with the sword." ¹⁹ So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, & if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing *more*."

When the 1st request was denied, they appealed again.

²⁰ Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men & with a strong hand. ²¹ Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage thru his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

The Edomite army made it clear they were not to pass thru.

At that point, Israel moved NW from Kadesh skirting the edge of Edom.

Aaron Dies 20:22-29

²² Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh & came to Mount Hor. ²³ And the Lord spoke to Moses & Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: ²⁴ “Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. ²⁵ Take Aaron & Eleazar his son, & bring them up to Mount Hor; ²⁶ and strip Aaron of his garments & put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered *to his people* & die there.” ²⁷ So Moses did just as the Lord commanded, & they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. ²⁸ Moses stripped Aaron of his garments & put them on Eleazar his son; & Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses & Eleazar came down from the mountain. ²⁹ Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron 30 days.

Moses is abt 120 at this point. Aaron was his **elder** brother, so he’s an old guy & it’s time to retire.

God tells them the end is at hand & that another must step in to take his place.

When God designs that a work continue, He will raise up a new leader to fill the shoes of the one who’s departing.

Ch21

Canaanites Defeated 21:1-3

¹ The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the S, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim. Then he fought against Israel & took *some* of them prisoners.

Arad was a petty Canaanite kingdom.

They had no doubt heard of Israel’s backing down in the face of the Edomites and decided to come out against Israel as they passed by their region.

This is the new generation’s 1st encounter with battle.

² So Israel made a vow to the Lord, & said, “If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.” ³ And the Lord listened to the voice of Israel & delivered up the Canaanites, & they utterly destroyed them & their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah.

Which means “**Utter Destruction.**”

Note that we see a **switch** from Moses as the one who interacts with God to “Israel.”

The tribal elders seem to be picking up more of the task of leadership now that Moses is on the way out.

More Complaining 21:4-9

We covered vs4-9 Sunday.

From Mt. Hor to Moab 21:10-20

¹⁰ Now the children of Israel moved on & camped in Oboth. ¹¹ And they journeyed from Oboth & camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness which *is* E of Moab, toward the sunrise. ¹² From there they moved & camped in the Valley of Zered. ¹³ From there they moved & camped on the other side of the Arnon, which *is* in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon *is* the border of Moab, between Moab & the Amorites. ¹⁴ Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord: “Waheb in Suphah, The brooks of the Arnon, ¹⁵ And the slope of the brooks that reaches to the dwelling of Ar, & lies on the border of Moab.” ¹⁶ From there *they went* to Beer, which *is* the well where the Lord said to Moses, “Gather the people together, & I will give them water.” ¹⁷ Then Israel sang this song: “Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it— ¹⁸ The well the leaders sank, dug by the nation’s nobles, by the lawgiver, with their staves.”

So here we get a little list of their journeys & where they camped. **[Map]**

At Beer, the people show they’ve learned how to respond to a lack of water by waiting on the Lord.

He told them to sink a well.

When they did, it produced an abundant supply of sweet water, not beer.

Note: They aren’t complaining now; **they’re singing!**

The new generation is learning to live & walk by faith.

And from the wilderness *they went* to Mattanah,¹⁹ from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth,²⁰ and from Bamoth, *in* the valley that *is* in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah which looks down on the wasteland.

Amorites Defeated 21:21-35

Vs21-35 recount Israel's defeat of 2 **Amorite** kingdoms.

That of a king named Sihon & another named Og.

The **Amorites** were one of the main groups that had conquered & settled Canaan.

Their original home was in W'n Syria; a land called **Amurru**.

The way the Canaanites, Hittites, & Amorites, that is, the main 3 groups that ruled Canaan, chopped it up was to turn a key city into a fortress & capital that was able to then dominate the surrounding region.

They were city-states.

The ruler of each of these cities fancied himself a king; the area of his control his kingdom.

Sihon & Og were w Amorite kings with city-states on the E side of the Jordan.

Years before they'd moved in on the native Moabites, who like the Edomites, were distant relatives of Israel.

They managed to carve out some of the Moabite territory for themselves.

Israel takes it back.

And that brings us to Israel's Tussle with Moab, which occupies the next 3 chs and is a dossier.

So we'll leave till next time.