

Message #20**Numbers 19:1-22**

Now we must keep the context in mind. In the previous chapters we saw that there were various uprisings of rebellion against God-appointed leadership so God punished the people directly and dramatically. He opened up the earth and wiped out people; He sent lightning bolts from heaven to kill people and He sent a plague that killed even more people. He did that so that His people would learn to respect His choice of leaders.

Now as a result, the people became afraid to even go near the tabernacle. So what God did in Numbers 17-18 was to establish that Aaron was His choice and the Levites could help him, but they needed to function in their God-ordained roles or else they would die.

It was important that the priests faithfully carry out their responsibilities just as God prescribed and it was also important that they be clean. If Israel wanted God's blessings, they needed to be clean and if we want God's blessings, we also need to be clean.

To inherit God's eternity, one cannot be unclean, but must be clean. No one became clean by works, but by substituting sacrifice. That cleanliness only comes through a sacrifice and cleansing water.

AS GOD BROUGHT ISRAEL NEAR THE PROMISED LAND, IT WAS CRITICAL THAT EVERY PERSON BE CEREMONIALLY CLEAN AND PURE THROUGH THE OFFERING AND THE ASHES OF THE RED HEIFER AND BY WASHING WITH WATER.

God will not ever bless that which is unclean. He will not bless a nation and He will not bless an individual. He will not pour out His blessings on one until they have been purified from sin. There was a sacrifice of a red heifer that cleansed Israel and there was also a cleansing in water.

Now this is a very unique passage. First of all, the sin issue pertains to a nation already saved. But second, even though one is already saved, does not mean they are clean in the sense that they will receive the blessings of God. We must not ever think that just because we are a believer we no longer sin. That will not get us anywhere.

Now when we sin, we may go directly to the Lord immediately and confess it and gain the cleansing forgiveness of God from "all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Israel could not do that.

When the nation Israel was traveling to the Promised Land, if someone sinned, they could not stop the march and put up the Tabernacle and then go through the logistics of offering a sin offering or trespass offering. This is where this chapter becomes so significant.

We may notice in **verse 1** that God is the one who speaks to Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron are not coming up with this, this is from God. In the previous chapter, God spoke directly to Aaron, but in this chapter, He addresses both Moses and Aaron.

The chapter contains two main component parts that both have to do with ceremonial purity. It was imperative that God's people make certain they were clean:

COMPONENT PART #1 – The Red Heifer cleansing ritual. 19:1-10

This red heifer clearly points to Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:13-14). According to **verse 2**, this was a law commanded by God that they were to communicate to Israel. The statement “This is a statute of the law which the LORD has commanded” puts a double emphasis on the legality of this if one wanted God's cleansing grace.

According to **verse 2**, when someone was unclean, they were to bring an unblemished red heifer which has no defect and upon which there had never been a yoke. So one must specifically find and bring a “red female cow” that has never been used for any human or profane work.

A red heifer was a relatively young cow that was somewhere between a calf and full grown cow. The redness symbolized that this was a sacrificial animal. Actually the cow was a reddish brown. It was not to have any spots or markings on it. The purpose of this sacrifice was “not to remove sin itself, but to remove the contamination of sin which death represented” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 237). This is all connected to becoming pure from sin (i.e. **19:9**).

According to **verse 3**, once the qualified cow had been selected, the Heifer was to be given to Eleazar the priest and brought outside the camp and had it slaughtered in his presence. A layman killed this animal and there was no altar. Taking this outside the camp represents getting the impurity out. The text does not tell us why Eleazar, rather than Aaron, was selected. Aaron was certainly advanced in years but also some scholars believe that Aaron was the high priest and it was not his job at this time to do this. This cow needed to be taken “outside the camp” and the High priest was not to do that. Regardless, God chose Eleazar to handle this. All of this points to Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:12).

According to **verse 4**, Eleazar, the priest, was to take his finger as the blood dripped from the neck of the cow and dip it in the blood and sprinkle it in the direction of the front of the tent of meeting seven times. The number seven indicates that this is a complete cleansing ritual. But this offering was certainly being made to the Lord. Only God is in a position to declare one clean. This animal died because of the sin of the people.

Then the heifer was to be burned in Eleazar's sight and its hide, flesh and blood and refuse all burned (**v. 5**).

The priest was to take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet material and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer (**v. 6**). We are not sure why the cedar wood is used; perhaps it is because it is a strong wood that emanates a sweet aroma. Some have speculated that Christ's cross was made of cedar wood. The hyssop plant is a sweet-smelling plant that often symbolized purification from death. This plant normally grew to a height of a little over a foot and contained pointed leaves and colored flowers.

The scarlet or crimson red focuses on the fact that this cleansing comes through the shedding of blood. Without the shedding of blood there is “no forgiveness of sins.”

All of these same ingredients were used to cleanse a leper (Lev. 14:4, 6, 48, 51-52).

According to **verse 7**, the priest was to wash his clothes and bathe in water and then he could come back into the camp but would be considered unclean until evening. This was a required ritualistic bath designed to show that once the proper sacrifice has been offered, one needs to be clean. You cannot connect to the sacrifice and then continue on in filth.

This clearly shows that once there has been atonement for sin, there must be a pursuit of that which is clean. According to **verse 8**, the one who actually burned the heifer actually did the same thing.

One very critical point to see here is that no one got clean on his own. There needed to be a sacrifice and there needed to be a priest and there needed to be a cleansing bath.

According to **verse 9**, the man who is clean was to gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them outside the camp in a clean place. These ashes would then be ready for use in water purification.

So you cannot have cleansing by water without the sacrifice. This purification was necessary for anyone who needed purification.

There are religious systems who say you may be saved by water baptism. You cannot possibly be saved by water baptism. To be saved, you need the blood of Jesus Christ applied to you because that is the only means of salvation and cleansing (Rev. 1:5).

COMPONENT PART #2 – The water purification cleansing issue. 19:11-22

A medical doctor whose name was S. I. McMillen wrote a book back around the year 1963 called *None of These Diseases*. In that book he discusses the fact that the medical world concluded by the 20th century that “no surgical procedure is performed without meticulous scrubbing of the hands” (p. 18). He said the reason why the medical world had come to this conclusion was because there had been a large number of infections that had led to the death of men, women and children due to not scrubbing hands. In 1960, the Health Department issued a book describing the method of washing hands and it was almost identical to “the Scriptural method given in Numbers 19.” As Dr. McMillen concluded, “At long last, in the year 1960, man finally muddled through. He learned, after centuries and at a frightful cost, what God gave to Moses by inspiration” (p. 18).

In this chapter there is no question that there is to be the use of water for cleansing purposes. Even though there is great medical information in this chapter, this is really about a national sin cleansing of Israel.

According to **verse 11**, if one touched a corpse, one needed to be clean. It is clear from this verse that coming in contact with something dead carried with it a high level of impurity that so polluted someone that they needed a special cleansing because that one was unclean for seven days.

According to **verse 12**, one needed to purify himself with water on the third day and then on the seventh day, he would be considered clean. So there was to be a double application of waters in order to get rid of the pollution. If one did not purify himself on the third day and the seventh day, he would not be clean.

If one refused to purify himself and approached the sacred Tabernacle in an unclean state, he was unclean and would be executed (**v. 13**).

Now what does this third day and seventh day cleansing mean? It means that complete cleansing is found in the Person raised from the dead on the third day. If you do not have that cleansing, you will not be clean and will be cut off from heaven and sentenced to everlasting condemnation.

Now this passage makes you wonder how many people go to church really dirty. O they have taken a bath or shower and put on nice clothes, but they have touched dead things during the week and God is not about to accept their worship, until they get that resolved.

In **verses 14-16** what is described is that it is almost impossible for one to walk through life without some contamination.

In **verse 14**, if someone died in a tent, any who went in the tent were unclean for seven days.

In **verse 15**, anything in the tent without a covering was unclean.

In **verse 16**, if one was out in the field and came across a dead body or skeleton or grave, one was unclean.

The point is you cannot live life and walk through the world and be clean. You will come in contact with things that will make you unclean.

When you are unclean, you need to be made pure in the sight of God if you want the blessings of God.

In **verses 17-19**, there was a three stage process:

Stage #1 - Mix the purification formula. **19:17**

Stage #2 - Sprinkle the purification matter on that which is unclean. **19:18**

Stage #3 - The cleansing of the one who performs the purification ritual. **19:19**

Now **verse 20** warns that if one chooses to remain in an unclean condition and refuses to get the cleansing graciously offered by the grace of God, he is to be cut off from the people. There is to be no fellowship whatsoever.

In **verse 21-22**, this was to be a perpetual statute for Israel; people may not be unclean. People must be clean if they want to worship and fellowship with God.

According to II Corinthians 7:1, we must cleanse ourselves.

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS:

- 1. God will not accept the worship of those who are unclean.**
- 2. God will not fellowship with those unclean.**
- 3. God will not bless those who are unclean.**
- 4. God offers cleansing grace found in the blood of Jesus Christ (I John 1:7-9).**
- 5. God offers washing grace found in the written Word of God (Ephesians 5:26).**
- 6. One who is unclean needs to confess the sin and turn to Jesus Christ for cleansing.**
- 7. We need constant cleansing because in this world death is stamped on everything (A. C. Gaebelien, *Numbers*, p. 337).**