

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
12-8-21
Numbers 19

The Taking Of A Red Heifer – Verses 1-2

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²“This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke.

19:1 That they bring you a red heifer: A heifer is a cow which has never been pregnant, and thus cannot yet give milk. They had to find one with a red color - which, of course, would be somewhat rare. "Normally the animal's colour did not matter. This one had to be red to resemble blood." (Wenham)

19:2 Without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come: These requirements made this particular animal even rarer. This red heifer, therefore, would be valuable, rare, and pure (because she had not yet been impregnated).

The Sacrifice, Burning, And Gathering Of Ashes From The Red Heifer – Verses 3-10

³ Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. ⁴ Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the tent of meeting. ⁵ While he watches, the heifer is to be burned—its hide, flesh, blood and intestines. ⁶ The priest is to take some cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool and throw them onto the burning heifer. ⁷ After that, the priest must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water. He may then come into the camp, but he will be ceremonially unclean till evening. ⁸ The man who burns it must also wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he too will be unclean till evening. ⁹ “A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They are to be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin. ¹⁰ The man who gathers up the ashes of the heifer must also wash his clothes, and he too will be unclean till evening. This will be a lasting ordinance both for the Israelites and for the foreigners residing among them.

19:9-10 What is the significance of the red heifer's ashes? When a person touched a dead body, he was considered unclean (i.e., unable to approach God in worship). This ritual purified the unclean person so that once again he could offer sacrifices and worship God. Death was the strongest of defilements because it was the final result of sin. Thus a special sacrifice—a red heifer—was required. It had to be offered by someone who was not unclean. When it had been burned on the altar, its ashes were used to purify water for ceremonial cleansing—not so much physically as symbolically. The unclean person then washed himself, and often his clothes and belongings, with this purified water as an act of becoming clean again.

Touching Dead Bodies Makes One Ceremonially Unclean – Verses 11-13

¹¹ “Whoever touches a human corpse will be unclean for seven days. ¹² They must purify themselves with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then they will be clean. But if they do not purify themselves on the third and seventh days, they will not be clean. ¹³ If they

fail to purify themselves after touching a human corpse, they defile the LORD's tabernacle. They must be cut off from Israel. Because the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on them, they are unclean; their uncleanness remains on them.

19:11 He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days: To be ceremonially unclean was not "sin," as we might think of it; it meant that one was barred from their regular fellowship with and worship of God, and their fellowship with God's people, until they were made clean.

A wonderful parallel is found in John 13:5-11; if we are "bathed" by Jesus, we need only to have our feet washed, as they become unclean in the normal practice of life. Yet, if we do not let Jesus "wash" us, we have no part with Him. We must receive the beautiful once-for-all cleansing Jesus brings to us when we are born again; yet continually come to Him to be cleansed of the "day-to-day" things.

19:13 Defiles the tabernacle of the LORD: These laws were relevant to all in Israel, but especially to priests, who had the potential to defile the tabernacle of the LORD. Under the New Covenant, the Christian also has a special call to purity, because we can also defile the dwelling place of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

How To Handle A Dead Body – Verses 14-16

¹⁴ “This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days, ¹⁵ and every open container without a lid fastened on it will be unclean. ¹⁶ “Anyone out in the open who touches someone who has been killed with a sword or someone who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days.

19:14 This is the law when a man dies in a tent: The practice of quarantining all those who come into contact with a dead body was a wonderful public health measure as well. Those potentially contaminated would be set aside until it could be seen if they contracted a disease from the dead body.

Every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean: In fact, this principle extended to every open vessel - which could potentially harbor disease causing organisms. If near a dead body, those vessels would be declared unclean and thus destroyed, reducing the danger of communicable disease.

The Purpose For The Ashes Of The Red Heifer – Verses 17-19

¹⁷ “For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. ¹⁸ Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or anyone who has been killed or anyone who has died a natural death. ¹⁹ The man who is clean is to sprinkle those who are unclean on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify them. Those who are being cleansed must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and that evening they will be clean.

19:17 They shall take some of the ashes of the heifer: The ashes of the red heifer, described earlier in the chapter, were sprinkled in fresh water, and this water was used for purification. And at evening he shall be clean: Thus, ashes of the red heifer (which the ingredients all speak of the work of Jesus on our behalf), combined with water (which speaks of the work of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit) combine together to bring cleansing. It can cleanse even the uncleanness brought about by death. All this cleansing is a precious picture; but the reality is in Jesus: For if the blood of bulls and goats and

the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13-14)

The Nature Of Uncleanness – Verses 20-22

²⁰ But if those who are unclean do not purify themselves, they must be cut off from the community, because they have defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on them, and they are unclean. ²¹ This is a lasting ordinance for them. “The man who sprinkles the water of cleansing must also wash his clothes, and anyone who touches the water of cleansing will be unclean till evening. ²² Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening.”

19:20 The man who is unclean and does not purify himself: This shows that uncleanness cannot correct itself. The unclean man will not just become clean. He must do something, and he must do what God says must be done in order to be clean. His own plans or schemes for cleansing mean nothing.

19:21-22 He who sprinkles the water of purification: Those who help others to become clean must walk in cleanness themselves. The one who regards the water of cleansing as a common thing (he who touches the water of purification) will himself be regarded as unclean. Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean: Uncleanness was easily transmitted, but cleanness had to be deliberately sought.