The Water Of Purification For Uncleanness
Numbers 19

Intro: This chapter deals with the ordinance of the red heifer. It is the remedy for contact with a dead body. Apparently, God gave this rite toward the start of the period of wilderness wanderings. Death, except for limited cases, had been suspended prior to this time. Now death returns, “with frightful rigour to reign over a doomed generation. ...If only the older generation died off in the wilderness, this alone would yield nearly 100 victims every day, and by each of these a considerable number of the survivors must have been defiled.” (R. Winterbotham, “Numbers” in Pulpit Commentary v. 2: p. 239,240.) Also, this rite is a type of the sacrifice of Christ, and thus important for us today.

I. RITE OF THE RED HEIFER (VERSES 1-10).

A. The details

1. The Israelites were to bring a red heifer for sacrifice to Eleazar.
2. The animal’s requirements.
   a. Must be a heifer (female) not a bullock.
      (1) A bullock was used for the ordinary sin-offerings; Lev. 4:14 “When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.”
      (2) Possibly a female because a female is the bearer of life; Gen. 3:20 “And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.”
   b. Must be red which represented blood:
      (1) Blood must be shed for the remission of sins.
         (a) Heb. 9:22 “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”
         (b) Eph. 1:7 “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;”
         (c) 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”
         (d) Rev. 1:5 “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,”
      (2) Possibly representing the sins themselves; Isa. 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”
   c. It must be without spot and blemish.
      (1) Christ is the only one qualified to offer His blood as a sacrifice for sins because He is the only one without spot and blemish.
      (2) Heb. 9:13-14 “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself
without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

(3) 1 Pet. 1:19 “But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"

d. Must never have been used under the yoke.
(1) Indicates that it still had its energy.
(2) Also indicates that it did not need the yoke to bring it into submission to the master’s will.
(a) Christ was always obedient to the will of the Father.
(b) Heb. 5:8-9 “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; 9And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;"
(c) Heb. 10:5-10 “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: 6In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. 7Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. 8Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; 9Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. 10By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

B. The rite itself.
1. Eleazar took the animal outside the camp.
   a. This is the only animal killed outside the camp.
   b. Heb. 13:11-12 “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. 12Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”
2. Eleazar would take some blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the tabernacle.
   a. The number seven stands for completeness or perfection.
   b. Possibly doing this stood for perfection and completeness in this sacrifice in view of Christ’s full atonement.
3. The entire heifer was burned with cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet.
4. The priest and the one burning the heifer would wash themselves and their clothes in water before coming into the camp, remaining unclean unto evening.
5. A man that was clean would gather the ashes and lay them in a clean place outside the camp.
   a. This would be kept as a water of separation, purification for sin (a water by which uncleanness was to be removed).
   b. This person would also bathe himself and remain unclean until evening.
II. General Procedure For Cleansing (Verse 11-13).

A. Any man touching a dead body would be unclean for seven days.
   1. He must cleanse himself with the water of separation being thrown on him on the third and seventh day.
   2. One who failed to cleanse himself on the third day would not be clean on the seventh day.

B. The one who failed to purify himself defiled the tabernacle.
   1. When one sins, it does not just affect the one person, but the whole people, by their example and influence.
   2. Thus, the need to mark and withdraw from evil ones.
      a. 1 Cor. 5:7 “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us”
      b. Rom. 16:17 “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”
      c. 2 The. 3:6, 14 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.... 14And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”
   3. One’s example is powerful.
      a. For evil; 1 Cor. 15:33 “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”
      b. For good;
         (1) Mat. 5:13-16 “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. 14Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”
         (2) 1 Tim. 4:12 “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”
      c. Christian the world is reading you; what are they reading? 2 Cor. 3:2 “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men.”

III. Specific Rules For Cleansing (Verse 14-22).

A. At a death:
   1. If in a tent; everyone who entered the tent and everything in the tent was unclean for seven days.
   2. If outside; anyone touching the body, bones or grave was unclean for seven days.
B. For cleansing:

1. A clean person must take the ashes of the burnt heifer with running water and put it into a vessel.
   a. Running water signifies baptism.
      (1) Running water is pure, clean, or fresh; not stale or stagnant water.
      (2) Heb. 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.”
      (3) It is not the state of the water in Hebrews 10:22; it is water not water mixed with anything else.
   b. Baptism is necessary for cleansing today.
      (1) Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
      (2) Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

2. The clean man would take hyssop and dip it into the water and sprinkle it on the tent, all the vessels and upon the person who was unclean.
   a. This would be done the third and seventh day.
   b. Doing this twice marked the clinging nature of the pollution to be removed.

3. On the seventh day the unclean man must wash himself with his clothes in water.
4. He would be clean the evening of the seventh day.

C. The punishment for neglect is repeated from verse 13.

1. The repetition of this punishment marked the heinousness of the neglect to seek its removal.
2. Thus, making it of utmost importance and emphatic.

D. This is an everlasting covenant (law) between God and Israel.

1. The person who sprinkled the purifying water must wash his clothes.
2. The person who touched the water would be unclean until evening.
3. Whatever an unclean person touched would be unclean until evening.

Conclusion: The uncleanness associated with death represented sin from which the Israelites had to be cleansed. God, by His grace, set forth the cleansing from this uncleanness and so typified for us the cleansing from sin which we need.

1. God sets the requirements for approach to Him.
2. Man cannot approach God on his own human terms and conditions.
3. God is the only one able to provide the cleansing man needs.