The Red Heifer Numbers 19:1-10

Nu m.19:2 This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:

This chapter is only concerning the preparing and using of the ashes which were to infuse the water of purification. The people had complained of the strictness of the law, which forbade their near approach to the tabernacle,

Num. 17:13 Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?

In answer to this complaint, they are here directed to purify themselves, so as that they might come as far as they had occasion without fear.

I. The method of preparing these ashes, by the burning of a red heifer, with a great deal of ceremony, Num. 19:1-10.

II. The way of using them.

1. They were designed to purify persons from the pollution contracted by a dead body, Nu 19:11-16.

2. They were to be put into running water (a small quantity of them), with which the person to be cleansed must be purified, Nu 19:17-22. And that this ceremonial purification was a type and figure of the cleansing of the consciences of believers from the pollutions of sin appears by the apostle's discourse, (Heb 9:13,14), where he compares the efficacy of the blood of Christ with the sanctifying virtue that was in "the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean."

Nu 19:1-10. We have here the divine appointment concerning the solemn burning of a red heifer to ashes, and the preserving of the ashes, that of them might be made, not a beautifying, but a purifying, water, for that was the utmost the law reached to; it offered not to adorn as the gospel does, but to cleanse only. This burning of the heifer, though it was not properly a sacrifice of atonement for wrong done, being not performed at the altar, yet was typical of the death and sufferings of Christ, by which he intended, not only to satisfy God's justice, but to purify and pacify our consciences, that we may have peace with God and also peace in our own bosoms, to prepare for which Christ died, not only like the bulls and goats at the altar, but like the heifer without the camp.

1. There was a great deal of care employed in the choice of the heifer that was to be burnt, much more than in the choice of any other offering,

Num. 19:2 This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:

1. It must not only be without blemish, typifying the spotless purity and sinless perfection of the Lord Jesus,
2. It must be a red heifer, because of the rarity of the colour, that it might be the more remarkable: the Jews say,

"If but two hairs were black or white, it was unlawful."

Christ, as man, was the Son of Adam, red earth, and we find him red in his apparel, red with his own blood, and red with the blood of his enemies.

1. It must be one on which never came yoke, which was not insisted on in other sacrifices, but thus was typified the voluntary offer of the Lord Jesus, when he said, Lo, I come, He was bound and held with no other cords than those of his own love. This heifer was to be provided at the expense of the congregation, because they were all to have a joint interest in it; and so all believers have in Christ.
2. There was to be a great deal of ceremony in the burning of it. The care of doing it was committed to Eleazar, not to Aaron himself, because it was not fit that he should do anything to render himself ceremonially unclean, no, not so much as till the evening

Num. 19:3 And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face:

Num. 19:8 And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even.

yet it being an affair of great concern especially in the significancy of it, it was to be performed by him that was next to Aaron in dignity. The chief priests of that time had the principal hand in the death of Christ.

1. The heifer was to be slain without the camp, as an impure thing, which identifies the insufficiency of the methods prescribed by the ceremonial law to take away sin. So far were they from cleansing effectually that they were themselves unclean; as if the pollution that was laid upon them continued to cleave to them. Yet, to answer this type, our Lord Jesus, being made sin and a curse for us, suffered without the gate, Heb 13:12.

2. Eleazar was to sprinkle the blood directly before the door of the tabernacle, and looking steadfastly towards it,

Nu 19:4 And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times:

This made it in some sort an expiation; for the sprinkling of the blood before the Lord was the chief solemnity in all the sacrifices of atonement; therefore, though this was not done at the altar, yet, being done towards the sanctuary, it was closely related that the virtue and validity of it depended upon the sanctuary, and were derived from it. This signified the satisfaction that was made to God by the death of Christ, our great high priest, who by the eternal Spirit (and the Spirit is called the finger of God, (Luke 11:20) offered himself without spot unto God; directly before the sanctuary, when he said, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. It also signifies how necessary it was to the purifying of our hearts that satisfaction should be made to divine justice. This sprinkling of the blood put virtue into the ashes.

3. The heifer was to be wholly burnt, Nu 19:5. This typified the extreme sufferings of our Lord Jesus, both in soul and body, as a sacrifice made by fire. The priest was to cast into the fire, while it was burning, cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet, which were used in the cleansing of lepers (Le 14:6,7), that the ashes of these might be mingled with the ashes of the heifer, because they were designed for purification.

4. The ashes of the heifer (separated as well as they could from the ashes of the wood wherewith it was burnt) were to be carefully gathered up by the hand of a clean person, and pounded and sifted, and so laid up for the use of the congregation, (Nu 19:9), not only for that generation, but for posterity; for the ashes of this one heifer were sufficient to season as many vessels of water as the people of Israel would need for many ages. The Jews say that this one served till the captivity, nearly 1000 years, and that there was never another heifer burnt till Ezra's time, after their return, grounded only upon the silence of their old records in the later times of their church, of which they had more full records, they find eight burnt between Ezra's time and the destruction of the second temple, which was about 500 years, These ashes are said to be laid up here as a purification for sin, because, though they were intended to purify only from ceremonial uncleanness, yet they were a type of that purification for sin which our Lord Jesus made by his death. Ashes mixed with water are used in scouring, but these had their virtue purely from the divine institution, and their accomplishment and perfection in Christ, who is the end of this law for righteousness.

a. That the water of purification was made so by the ashes of a heifer, whose blood was sprinkled before the sanctuary; so that which cleanses our consciences is the abiding virtue of the death of Christ; it is his blood that cleanses from all sin, 1Jo 1:7.

b.. That the ashes were sufficient for all the people. There needed not to be a fresh heifer slain for every person or family that had occasion to be purified, but this one was enough for all, even for the strangers that sojourned among them (Nu 19:10); so there is virtue enough in the blood of Christ for all that repent and believe the gospel, for every Israelite, and not for their sins only, but for the sins of the whole world, 1Jo 2:2.

c. That these ashes were capable of being preserved without waste to many ages. No bodily substance is so incorruptible as ashes are, these a very fit emblem of the everlasting efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. He is able to save, and able to cleanse, to the uttermost.

d. These ashes were laid up as a stock or treasure, for the constant purification of Israel from their pollutions; so the blood of Christ is laid up for us in the word as an inexhaustible fountain of merit, to which by faith we may have recourse daily for the purging of our consciences; see Zec 13:1.

e. All those that were employed in this service were made ceremonially unclean by it; even Eleazar himself, though he did but sprinkle the blood, Nu 19:7. He that burned the heifer was unclean (Nu 19:8), and he that gathered up the ashes (Nu 19:10); so all that had a hand in putting Christ to death contracted guilt by it: his betrayer, his prosecutors, his judge, his executioner, all did what they did with wicked hands, though it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Ac 2:23); yet some of them were, and all might have been cleansed by the virtue of that same blood which they had brought themselves under the guilt of. Some make this to signify the imperfection of the legal services, and their insufficiency to take away sin, inasmuch as those who prepared for the purifying of others were themselves polluted by the preparation. The Jews say, This is a mystery which Solomon himself did not understand, that the same thing should pollute those that were clean and purify those that were unclean.

II Cor. 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

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| http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/images/spacer.gif | According to Yhwh's instructions to Moses and Aaron the Israelites prepared for sacrifice a red heifer which was free from blemish and which had not yet been broken to the yoke. It was slain outside the camp, in the presence of Eleazar, representing the high priest; Eleazar dipped his fingers in the blood and sprinkled it seven times in the direction of the tabernacle; then the carcass was burned in his presence—hide, flesh, and blood. The priest himself took cedar-wood, hyssop, and scarlet, and cast them upon the pyre. Another man, ceremonially clean, then gathered up the ashes of the consumed heifer and stored them in a clean place outside the camp, that they might be used in preparing water of purification. The priest, the man who attended to the burning of the heifer, and the one who gathered the ashes had to wash themselves and their clothes; they remained ceremonially unclean until sunset.  The ashes were dissolved in fresh water, which was sprinkled on those who were contaminated by coming in contact with a dead body or in proximity to the dead. The one so contaminated remained unclean for seven days; he was sprinkled with the water on the third and seventh days, and at sunset of the last day was clean again. The sprinkling was done by one who was clean, and who, after the sprinkling, washed himself and his clothes and remained unclean until sunset. All who touched the water or the unclean person were likewise unclean until sunset. The one who neglected to observe this law was deprived of religious privileges, for he defiled the sanctuary of Yhwh (Num. xix. 1-22). Spoils of war consisting of metal vessels were to be purified by fire and finally cleansed by the water of purification (Num. xxxi. 21-24). |

Deut. xxi. 3, 4). The animal was required to be the lawful property of the sacrificer (II Sam. xxiv. 24; Deut. xxviii. 19; Ezra vi. 9; vii. 17, 22