

say that to Him when we stubbornly persist in our own ways. The verb means ‘desist’, ‘cease’, ‘leave off’, and is used, for instance, of the ceasing of the plagues. ‘Leave me alone!’, they exclaim, like a petulant child. It is ironic that the

only other time the expression ‘Let us alone’ is used in the AV is by the demon-possessed wishing to be left undisturbed by Jesus’ healing hand in Mark 1:24 and Luke 4:34. By responding in this way, Israel was being as mad as that.

Water, wine and the red heifer

4. Marriage and the bride*

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WE NOW COME to the final connection between the red heifer and Jesus’s beginning of signs: the theme of marriage. The red heifer had to be female—a rare prerequisite under the Mosaic Law. A heifer obviously connotes a virgin, as does the phrase, “on which a yoke has never come” (Num. 19:2). The age of the heifer when sacrificed was probably about three years old (Gen. 15:9; Isa. 15:5; Jer. 48:34). The animal, then, had to be pure.

The bride of Christ

This idea of virginity, combined with the other themes of water, blood, the third and seventh days, and the everlasting covenant symbolised in Melchizedek, seems to culminate in “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9). Just as God provided Adam with his wife on the seventh day,¹ so the ashes of the red heifer were used in the rite of cleansing on the seventh day (Num. 19:17-19), and the water was made wine on the seventh day.² All foretell the marriage supper of the Lamb; they are a picture and pledge of Christ being united with his bride in the sabbath (seventh day) of the Kingdom.

Underscoring this idea of marriage there are several historical analogies to the heifer rites, where water is treated for a specific purpose.³ Firstly, in Exodus 32 Moses makes the people drink the water mixed with the dust of the golden calf. Interestingly, Edersheim compares Moses with “the friend of the bridegroom” of John 3:29.⁴ Apparently, both the bride and groom would have a “friend”, whose role it was to act as an intermediary, and a guarantor of chastity, before the marriage. The friend of the bridegroom would also lead the bride and groom to meet each other before the ceremony.

Thus Moses is acting as the “friend of the bridegroom” in Exodus 19:17: “And Moses

brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain”. Moses is bringing forth the bride to meet the husband, but even as he is in the mount confirming the ‘marriage’ covenant the people are breaking faith. Therefore, when Moses returns, he crushes the golden calf to powder, mingles it with water, and compels the whole nation to drink of it.

This is mirrored in the law of jealousy (Num. 5), which is the second historical analogy of treated water. Here, the wife of a jealous husband would drink water mixed with dust from the floor of the tabernacle in order to prove her faithfulness. If she was an adulteress her stom-

* All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV unless stated otherwise. The citation from the *Christadelphian* is from the electronic edition produced by Logos Library Systems on behalf of the Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.

1. Harry Whittaker: *Studies in the Gospels* (Biblia, 1999, p. 82). From reading Genesis 1:27,31 it would appear that Eve was created on the sixth day. However, from the record of Genesis 2 it could be argued that, although Eve was created on the sixth day, she was presented to Adam on the seventh, when he awoke from his “deep sleep” (2:21). Brother Whittaker’s point is stimulating, even if it is not provable.
2. See Part 2, [Nov. 2003, p. 403](#).
3. Gray: *Numbers* (ICC, Charles Scribner & Sons, 1903) p. 246.
4. Alfred Edersheim: “Mothers, Daughters, and Wives in Israel” (*Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 1876, Philologos Religious Online Books, www.philologos.org). Hence John the Baptist describes himself as the friend of the bridegroom, as he brings Christ’s bride to him, and similarly the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2. The friend of the bridegroom was a feature of Judean marriage customs, whereas the custom in Galilee was to have “children of the bride chamber” (Mt. 9:15, AV).

ach would swell and her thigh “rot”. Both of these analogies are to do with marriage, and Israel being viewed as the bride of God.

A strong spiritual lesson is to be gained here. Brother Cowlshaw compares the trial by ordeal for the wife of the jealous husband with our attendance, as the ecclesial bride, at the breaking of bread:

“For some of us it must be written that the weekly Feast of Remembrance is also a trial by ordeal, complete in all its parts. Bread and wine, improperly eaten and imbibed, may in their outworking reveal our guilt. How altogether revealing are verses 29 and 30 of 1 Cor. 11. “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation (judgment) to himself, not discerning (discriminating) the Lord’s body. For *this cause* (the improper intake of bread and wine), many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep”. Put shortly, verse 30 exposes the effect, and verse 29 the cause in the outworking of this weekly trial by ordeal in the Breaking of Bread”.⁵

So, in the purifying waters of the red heifer, there is a shadow of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Once the people had been cleansed they were free to re-enter the camp to be reunited with their husband, the Lord God Himself.

The marriage at Cana

I move forward now to consider marriage in the context of John 2. That the water was changed into wine at a marriage feast is surely significant. More than this, when the ‘bride’, in the form of the first disciples, saw the miracle, she “believed in him” (v. 11). So this miracle begins to unite the Lord with his ecclesial bride.⁶

That the wine is also a symbol of the Lord’s blood of salvation was discussed in the [previous article](#).⁷ But some further points for consideration can be developed here. Firstly, after the wine ran out, why was more needed? Was it purely to save face? Hutchison offers an attention-grabbing suggestion:

“The reason of the shame is not to be sought simply in the implied lack of hospitality, but chiefly in the punctilious ceremonial of Jewish marriage. It was commonly held that no marriage was valid without the formal act of blessing. A bride over whose nuptials the seven blessings had not been pronounced was actually regarded as still unmarried. These seven blessings, further, could not properly

be uttered without the use of wine. Cf. *Vide Dr Cassel, p82*”.⁸

That wine was needed to perform the seven blessings is confirmed by many sources. But did the wine run out during the ceremony or during the feast? Or was the ceremony of the seven blessings performed throughout the customary seven days of feasting? If wine was, as Hutchison believes, needed for the ceremony, why was it carried to the master of the feast rather than the rabbi? Maybe protocol demanded this. Whatever the problems conjured on a practical level by Hutchison’s view, on a spiritual level his idea fits the type beautifully. For, just as Adam’s wife came from his side (Gen. 2:21-23), so Christ’s bride is created from the water and blood which flow from his side (Jno. 19:34). Without the wine there can be no marriage; without the blood there is no bride, for she cannot be redeemed. The bride-price for sin cannot be paid without the shedding of blood.

Marriage is a perfect symbol for the great celebrations of the coming Kingdom. It signifies joy and the start of a new life. All our thoughts about marriage, blood, water and the bride find their climax in the following passage:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and *cleanse her with the washing of water* by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, *not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish*” (Eph. 5:25-27).

Notice the language of the red heifer ritual, the “washing of water”, that she might be “without blemish”. Notice also the exhortation of love

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5. Robert Cowlshaw: “The red heifer” (Letters to the editor, *The Christadelphian*: Vol. 95, 1958), p. 417.
 6. The idea of the ecclesial bride is confirmed in John 4, where the Lord speaks with the woman at the well. Wells are often connected with marriage and courtship in Scripture, for example Genesis 24:29; indeed marriage is the very topic of conversation since the Lord asks the woman about her husband. In offering the woman living water, and the opportunity to worship in spirit and truth, he is inviting her to become part of the bride of Christ.
 7. Another allusion to the feast being a type of the breaking of bread might be that the servants who distribute the wine are actually called “deacons” in the Greek.
 8. John Hutchison: *Our Lord’s Signs in John’s Gospel* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1892).

that Paul draws out of this. The red heifer ritual is all about God's love for Israel, and the extent to which He wished to make His people clean in order to dwell with them. The water-made-wine epitomises the totality of Christ's love for us.

Be glad, rejoice and be ready

And so we read in Revelation 19: "I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude . . . saying . . . ' . . . Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God'" (vv. 6-9).

The cleansing of a bride through water, blood and spirit is what the red heifer ritual and the provision of the new wine announced—a bride to be united to the Lord Jesus Christ through the everlasting covenant, mirrored in Melchizedek. We are the Bride of Christ. But have we 'made ourselves ready'? Have we ceased to be associated with the 'works of death'? Referring back to Numbers 19, if a person had become defiled by a dead body he would only cleanse himself with the water of purification once he had ceased contact with the body, that is, once it had been buried. The lesson is clear; we must forsake sin, and cease all fellowship with the works of death and darkness.

Indeed, it is the idea of transformation that is at the very heart of the matter. The water of purification 'transformed' an unclean person into one who was clean. Transformation is again highlighted by the water-made-wine. John lays the stress on transformation when he speaks of "the water that was *made* wine" (2:9). Moreover, when this sign is mentioned later in his Gospel, it is recorded thus: "So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had *made* the water wine" (4:46). It is not, then, the marriage which John primarily focuses on, but the change which took place when the water was transformed into wine. The lesson is plain; just as a common substance was transformed into the nobler substance of wine, we too must be transformed by the renewing of our

minds. We who are short-tempered must become longsuffering, we who are condemnatory must become gracious, and we who are full of the lies of sin must become full of truth. In short, we must put on Christ.

This idea of transformation ties in perfectly with the exhortation that the writer to the Hebrews draws from comparing the new wine of the blood of Christ with the ashes of the red heifer:

"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?" (Heb. 9:13,14).

It is the blood of our Lord, and a personal appreciation of his sacrifice for us, which transforms us from death to life, from being unclean to clean, from practising "dead works" to serving "the living God". It transforms us into the Bride of Christ.

That is our challenge, then: to be fruitful and to walk in the light, not contaminating ourselves with the things of death. But we also have the comfort that when we fail we will be renewed through repentance. Perhaps this is what the repetition of the sprinkling teaches us, just as in John 13 the Lord says that it is only the feet of those who have already been cleansed through baptism that he needs to wash (v. 10). So too we are "sprinkled" (Heb. 10:22) on a daily basis as we confess our sins to God and experience His grace. Thus, as Matthew Henry says, it is not the "wound of sin and death that is fatal then, so much as the contempt of the remedy".⁹

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

(Concluded)

9. Matthew Henry: *The Practical and Devotional Family Bible* (condensed commentary, William Collins, 1861), p. 173.

Our cover picture for 2004 was taken on Mount Gilboa, and shows some of the wild flowers for which this place is noted in the spring, the most prominent of which are the scarlet anemones.—T.B.