

Some Jews in Israel today, for example those of the Temple Institute in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, have dedicated themselves to the reproduction of the temple vessels.\* Their desire is to rebuild the temple, but of course they cannot do this without a red heifer. Interestingly:

“April 10, 2002 Israel National News reports . . . It can now be revealed that less than one month ago, a ‘Red Heifer’ was born in Israel . . . The rabbis found her to be kosher and were satisfied that this heifer could indeed be a candidate to be used in the process of purification of the Temple priests described in the book of Numbers, chapter 19 . . . The significance of the ‘Red Heifer’ is twofold. First, it is a sign from the Lord that the time is drawing near for the third Jewish Temple to be rebuilt. Second, it is a Biblical sign that we are definitely approaching time of the tribulation and the coming of the Anti-Christ written about by Daniel, Jesus, Paul, and John”.†

Fascinating information, though I am not sure of its real significance. Such excitement at the birth of the red heifer shows its rarity, and its necessity for temple worship.—S.J.

\* Leen & Kathleen Ritmeyer, *The Ritual of the Temple in the Time of Christ* (Carta, 2002), p. 80.

† <http://www.voicefromzion.org/articles/biblicalprophecy/redheifer.htm>

could in no wise approach the Lord God. It hardly needs to be said that the Lord Jesus is much more vital, for without him we are without hope, without God, miserable, dead.

With the ordinances of the red heifer now set as the foundation of our study, we move on to build the background of Jesus’s first sign, the changing of water into wine.

(To be continued)



## Encounter

*Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor*

# The Law given through Moses

## 23. The cleansing of the leper (1)\*

Islip Collyer

**T**HE BASIC TRUTH of the atonement revealed in the New Testament is seen by an attentive student in the Law given through Moses. There have been many polemical experts who have attempted to expound the Christian doctrine of atonement almost in the manner of a barrister showing the bewildering ramifications of complex laws. They have subjected the Lord Jesus to a scrutiny which is offensive to those who love him, and often they have tried to make a literal application of apostolic language which is obviously figurative. We never yet heard of one who tried to literalise the figure of ‘washing

garments and making them white in the blood of the Lamb’, but the ideas of being redeemed, or bought with a price, or of sins being carried by Christ, have often been taken in too literal a sense.

In writing to the Ephesians the apostle said, “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (4:32). This is the basic truth, and all ceremonies must be understood in harmony therewith. The only way in which sin can

\* First published December 1948.

be put away is by the forgiveness of God. The only possibility of propitiation is by Divine forbearance (Rom. 3:25). Whether we speak of sins being washed away in the waters of baptism, or in the blood of Christ, or of sins being laid upon the Saviour, or whether we put stress on the need for a Divinely prepared robe of righteousness, the real meaning is that, if sinners in faith and obedience respond to the offer of life in the appointed way, God for Christ's sake will forgive them. Sin against God can only be remitted by the forgiveness of God.

NOW in the Law, although there were so many ceremonial observances in the offerings for sin, it is made quite clear that the real cleansing is by Divine forgiveness. Thus in Leviticus there is a passage regarding congregational sin. The people had to offer a young bullock for their transgression; the elders, as representing the nation, had to lay their hands on the head of the animal, as if in symbol putting their sin on him. The bullock had to be slain before the Lord, and the anointed priest had to take of the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the veil. Some of the blood had to be put on the horns of the altar. The rest of the blood had to be poured out at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering, on which the fat was burned. Then we read: "the priest shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them" (4:20). Four times in the course of this chapter these words occur: "[the sin] shall be forgiven him/them" (vv. 20,26,31,35).

In many other parts of the Old Testament this idea is emphasised. It is in harmony with the illuminating words of David: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Ps. 32:1,2). Whether we read of the offering of sacrifice, the washing away or the covering of sin, the real meaning is always the same. God forgives on the basis that He has provided. Always there must be genuine repentance; there must be no guile in the spirit of the man who seeks forgiveness. The approach to the throne of grace must be in faith and with full readiness to obey. Whether with an elaborate ceremonial such as was required under the Law, or with the simple and expressive ordinance of baptism as the New Testament means of induction into Christ, the Divine commandment must be obeyed. Then God, Who is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness"

(Ex. 34:6), is ready to respond, "[the sin] shall be forgiven him".

This truth, so plainly revealed in the New Testament, and stated with almost equal clearness in the Law, helps to explain some of the unusual symbols and enables us to perceive the hidden meanings. On the great Day of Atonement the outstanding symbol, that which all the people would see, presented the idea of life and liberty rather than of death. All the people would see the scapegoat led away into the wilderness, there to be set free. All would assuredly realise that it could not in any literal sense bear their sins away into an uninhabited land, any more than the shedding of blood could effect a literal cleansing of garments. It was a figure to be obeyed and observed, but not to be regarded as capable in itself of removing national guilt. Sins could only be put away by Divine forgiveness. The same thought is expressed by the psalmist: "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (103:12); and by the prophet: "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19).

On the Day of Atonement, as we noted in a [former article](#),<sup>1</sup> the lot was used to determine which of the two kids should live and which should die. Men cast lots when they felt unable to decide a matter for themselves, and they expected God to make the right choice for them. We must not suppose that God always responded then, any more than at the present day; but when the use of the lot was commanded, as in this matter of the scapegoat, it clearly indicated that man was not *permitted* to choose. We cannot suppose that it was a matter of any importance which of the two kids should escape, but the emphasis on Divine choice was essential in the type. Life is to emerge from the atoning sacrifice, and the choice of that which is to live belongs solely to God.

THE ceremony enjoined in connection with the cleansing of a leper (Lev. 14) suggests similar thoughts. As was pointed out in an [earlier article](#),<sup>2</sup> there were some very practical rules clearly designed for the benefit of the nation in mortal life, and no further explanation of them is needed. The careful discrimination between different forms of skin disease, in which the priest had to

1. [Jan. 2003, p. 11.](#)

2. [Dec. 2001, p. 458.](#)

perform the unenviable task of medical scrutiny—the rigid segregation of contagious cases, the removal of hair, the washing and waiting to determine the true nature of any blemish that was under observation—these were rules of obvious utility; they were in fact necessary for national health. The final ceremony, when a man or a building was pronounced clean, is in a different category and we may well seek for hidden meanings.

Two birds were taken for the man who was to be cleansed. One of them was killed in an earthen vessel over running water. The priest then took cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop, and with these emblems sprinkled some of the blood seven times over the man who was to be cleansed. The living bird was dipped in the blood of the one that had been slain, and was then set free in the open field. Still there was much for the cleansed man to do before his restoration was complete. He must shave off all his hair and wash his clothes and flesh in water that he might be clean. He might then come into the camp, yet still for another seven days he should “tarry abroad out of his tent” (v. 8). He should again shave off all hair from head, beard and eyebrows, and then, after further washing of clothes and flesh, he should be accounted clean. On the eighth day he should bring three lambs, three tenth deals of flour and a log of oil, if he could possibly afford such an offering, and then would follow the most interesting and significant part of the ceremony.

IF the reader has forgotten just what was required, let him not look up the details for the moment, but rather pause to consider the significance of the matters already mentioned. We must surely admit that these observances go far beyond anything that was needed from the medical point of view. As there was no moral guilt in being diseased, it seems strange that the restoration of the unfortunate one should need a ceremonial going beyond that which was required when a man had been guilty of unmistakable sin. If we recognise the fact that leprosy was typical of sin, and if we perceive the possibility that there was an element of ritual prophecy in the ceremonial, the matter becomes intelligible.

It would be impossible to think of a better illustration of sin than this Eastern disease which so menaced the people and imposed such terrible and revolting duties on the priests under the Mosaic Law. The manner in which it started, perhaps as the result of only a little lack of proper

care and cleanliness, the gradual and insidious development, dulling the mind of the victim as it increased its hold, and the dreadful results when the disease pursued its course unchecked—in all these matters leprosy seems the obvious type of sin.

If we think of a leper as typical of sinful humanity, we note that in the same chapter of Leviticus there are rules with almost the same ritual for cleansing a house. This seems to enhance the value of the type. The human race is in a leprous condition, and the entire world in which men live requires cleansing, like the plague-stricken house. Many of the stones need to be pulled down and cleaned before the house can be a fit residence for the servants of God.

If our spiritual perceptions—or, as some men might say, our lively imagination—can carry us thus far, there is much that falls beautifully into place in the elaborate type.

If a reader who does not remember the details of the final ceremony in cleansing the leper will now consult the text in Leviticus 14, he will find something of extraordinary significance. On the eighth day after the elaborate washing and waiting there came the ceremony with the lambs, the fine flour and the log of oil. One of the lambs was to be offered as a trespass offering and, with the log of oil, was to be waved before the Lord. The lamb was to be slain, and the priest was to take of its blood and put it on the man who had been leprous, on the tip of his right ear, the thumb of his right hand and the great toe of his right foot. We may see in this ceremony the idea of thorough consecration of ear, foot and hand, in hearing the Word of God, walking in His way and performing His work.

But why should this very special ceremony be for the cleansed leper? It was not used for other worshippers in all the ritual prescribed for them. It was ceremonial reserved for the high priest and his sons (Ex. 29:20; Lev. 8:23). Apart from the very special consecration of the priests, this ritual was only used in the final restoration of the leper. Why should this be, unless the cleansing of the leper was a particularly important type, representing human nature purified and forgiven, and with ear, foot and hand dedicated to a service of priesthood in the age to come?

There was yet another significant rite with the cleansed leper, going even beyond that which was needed for the priests, and in some ways perhaps the most significant of all. It must be reserved for [another article](#).