

Just as God bought back His first-born for Himself from slavery to Pharaoh, so the Israelites were to imitate this by sanctifying their first-born to Him, and redeeming them, as the following passage (vv. 11-16) will go on to describe in much fuller detail.

The sanctification of the first-born was not the only way in which Israel had to show what came first for them. The firstfruits of the ground were also to be offered to God, in a reminder that the fruitfulness of the earth is a blessing from Him. The first-born of beasts were also to be dedicated to God. For the modern disciple the lesson must also be learned. What is first of ours we must also strive to make God's. The first of our possessions, our thoughts, our time, our resources, our love, our energies, our sacrifices—all these should be given for Him and made with Him in view.

1. **v. 43 ordinance.** The Hebrew term *chuqqah* occurs about 100 times, usually translated 'statute' (77 times) or 'ordinance' (22 times). Abraham was praised in Genesis 26:5 for keeping God's statutes, and from that first occurrence the term does not occur again until the Passover. In Exodus it occurs at 12:14,17,43; 13:10, and then a further three occasions in Exodus 27-29. After this it is in fairly common usage.
2. **v. 46 neither shall ye break a bone.** The link with the Lord's sacrifice is clear enough: not a

bone of *his* was to be broken (Ps. 34:20; Jno. 19:36).

3. **v. 48 let all his males be circumcised.** The implication of this is that the family is an important unit of fellowship; or, to put it another way, that fellowship is expected to have a basis in and a meaning for the family. The family members do not go their own independent ways; whether you are from near or (as in the case of this verse) from far, the expectation is that you bring your family with you and that they keep the Passover along with you (and partly because you do). This principle will be tough to enact in modern society, in which family members have increasing (or sometimes total) autonomy; but it presents an ideal and a principle, which is a Biblical one.
4. **v. 50 Thus did [Israel] . . . as the LORD commanded . . . so did they.** Compare verse 28; the repetition of this point is probably important in grasping the structure of Exodus 12. In obeying the Lord's command the children of Israel are following in the footsteps of Moses and Aaron themselves. Compare the emphasis in 7:6,10,20.
5. **v. 51 armies.** Literally, 'hosts'. The military sense may be relevant here, given God's portrayal as "a man of war" in Exodus 15:3.
6. **13:2 womb.** The same Hebrew term, *rechem*, is translated "matrix" in verse 12. The English term 'matrix' comes from the Latin word for womb. The word '*mater*' and our English 'mother' derive from the same source.

Water, wine and the red heifer*

Sarah Joiner

IT HAS BEEN a number of years now since I first heard my father make several connections between the account of Jesus turning the water into wine in John 2 and the account of the ritual of the red heifer in Numbers 19. Strikingly, no commentator which I have read so far on John 2 has made any association with the red heifer. So was my father being imaginatively overactive and stretching the symbolism of Jesus's first miracle? Or had he found a spiritual treasure which many had overlooked? In this short series of articles I hope to demonstrate that the latter is certainly the case.

1. The red heifer

BEFORE CONSIDERING the ritual of the red heifer in detail, it is important to realise that it underscores for us one of our first principles: that death is not the start of an amazing adventure, it is the punishment for sin. Brother Roberts puts it thus: "[God] being, in

essence, the Life of the universe . . . we may understand how death—as the *negation* of His own work, and the penalty for transgression against Himself, should come under the peculiar reprobation manifest in the Mosaic ordinances, that contact with death made a man defiled with

a defilement calling for instant cleansing".¹ It is only when we see death as a punishment, and the cessation of life, that we understand that the ritual of the red heifer "was one of the great signposts of truth".²

The red heifer ritual

Now on to the details of the red heifer ritual, as recorded in Numbers 19. Anyone who had come into contact with a dead body, a grave or a bone was to go outside the camp of Israel, for to come into contact with death was to be made ceremonially unclean. The red heifer's ashes were then mixed with "living water" and sprinkled upon the death-defiled person.

After being sprinkled with the water of separation (the mixture of ashes and water) on the third day, the unclean person would then be sprinkled again on the seventh day, also purifying himself by washing his clothes and bathing in water. On the evening of the seventh day he was pronounced clean and could then re-enter the camp. Anyone refusing to do this would be killed (on the seventh day?).

In terms of the animal to be used, and how the ashes were to be obtained, the following stipulations had to be met:

- v. 2. Without spot or blemish, red, virgin, never been under yoke, female.
- v. 2. Brought from among the people.
- v. 3. Given to Eleazar, the high priest's heir, to take outside the camp, so that the high priest could remain clean.
- v. 3. Eleazar must witness the slaughtering.
- v. 4. Eleazar to sprinkle the blood seven times towards the tabernacle (towards the holy of holies from the Mount of Olives at the time of Jesus³).
- v. 5. Entirely burned, including its blood!
- v. 5. Eleazar to witness the burning.
- v. 6. Burned with cedar, hyssop and scarlet, which the priest would cast into the fire.
- vv. 7-10. Transferred uncleanness to:
 - the priest who witnessed the slaying
 - the man who burned her
 - the clean man who gathered the ashes.
 They were unclean until evening, but could then return to the camp after washing.
- v. 9. Ashes collected and mixed with living water for purification as necessary.
- v. 12. The unclean person must purify himself with the water on the third day and the seventh day. He would then be clean on the seventh day.

The heifer foreshadowed the Lord Jesus in a very powerful and unique way, as the [table](#) shows.

It is important to consider what the Mosaic ritual teaches us about the Lord Jesus, because "It is for the lack of a sufficient pondering of these matters of the law that foreshadows Christ, that many errors have been made concerning him".⁴

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- * All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise stated. Citations of articles from *The Christadelphian* are from the electronic edition produced by Logos Library Systems on behalf of the Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association.
1. Robert Roberts, *The Law of Moses* (Seventh edition, 1987, CMPA), p. 264, as cited by J. A. Swaish: "The Red Heifer" (*The Christadelphian*, Vol. 95, 1958, p. 265).
 2. J. A. Swaish, *ibid.*
 3. Leen & Kathleen Ritmeyer, *The Ritual of the Temple in the Time of Christ* (Carta, 2002), pp. 70-71.
 4. C. C. Walker, "The Water of Separation" (*The Christadelphian*, Vol. 52, 1915, p. 205). For a fuller treatment of what the red heifer teaches us about the nature of the Lord Jesus, see Robert Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-6.
 5. Edersheim, *The Temple* (The Religious Tract Society, London, 1908), p. 355.
 6. Jeffrey, Grant R., *The Signature of God* (Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 1996), pp. 152-3.
 7. Annas had been deposed by the Romans in A.D. 15, but the Jews continued to recognise his authority (Lk. 3:2; Jno. 18:13; Acts 4:6). Caiaphas was Annas's son-in-law.
 8. W. F. Barling, *Law and Grace* (Frank Jukes, Birmingham, 1952), pp. 182-3. This concept of the red heifer being somehow separate from the Law is also underscored by its positioning in the Old Testament canon. It is not recorded with the offerings of Leviticus, it stands alone. This might be for the reason given above by Brother Barling. Nonetheless, we are still left with questions as to why there is "absence of allusion to it in Leviticus 22:4-7 . . . [this] is more difficult of explanation if the present law at the time enjoyed a general sanction . . . Leviticus 11:24-28 requires nothing more than this simpler cleansing [bathing in plain water] in the case of any man defiled by the carcass of a dead beast" (Gray, *Numbers* [ICC, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903], p. 242). Perhaps the context of the high death tolls of Numbers 16 and 17 warrants its positioning here. Maybe the offering of the red heifer was introduced at this time, as a supplementary law, to underscore for the entire people of Israel the gravity of sin and death brought by Korah's rebellion. Further to this, it should be noted that the first word of chapter 19 is "And", which links it with what has gone before.
 9. "This offering transmits impurity from the purified to the purifier" (Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* [Word Biblical Commentary, 5, Word Books, 1984], p. 213).
 10. Edersheim, *op. cit.*

The red heifer and the Lord Jesus	
Numbers 19	The Lord Jesus
Came from among the people (v. 2).	Came from among the people (Heb. 2:14).
“... the cost of this sacrifice, which was always great, since a pure red heifer was very rare, was defrayed from the Temple Treasury, as being offered for the whole people”. ⁵	Paid for by the temple’s pitiful thirty pieces of silver (Mt. 27:9).
Brought to cleanse from the defilement of death.	Cleanses our consciences from “dead works” (Heb. 9:13,14).
Without spot or blemish (v. 2).	Without spot or blemish (1 Pet. 1:18,19).
Knew no yoke of bondage, symbol of sin (v. 2).	Knew no bondage of sin (2 Cor. 5:21).
Female.	Sold for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a female slave. Male slaves were sold for fifty pieces of silver. ⁶
Given into the custody of the priest Eleazar, the one due to succeed the high priest (v. 3).	Arrested and taken to Caiaphas, Annas the high priest’s successor. ⁷
Uniquely, taken outside the camp to be slain (v. 3). The things which the red heifer foreshadowed “belonged to a system altogether separate and distinct from the Law itself”. ⁸	Christ was also taken outside the gates of Jerusalem to be slain. He brought salvation independently of the Law (Heb. 13:12,13).
Slain in front of the priest’s heir, but not killed by him (v. 3).	Christ was slain by the Gentile Romans in view of, but not by, the priest (Mt. 27:41-43).
The one who gathered the ashes had to be clean (v. 9), as did the priest who slew the heifer, and also the one who sprinkled those who had been defiled by death (v. 18). But all these became unclean by their contact with the heifer.	Jesus “knew no sin, but became sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). ⁹
All who were involved with the rites of the heifer became unclean, but they were only unclean until the evening, not for the full seven days.	Jesus’s time of ‘uncleanness’ or death lasted only a short time; the grave could not hold him (Acts 2:24).
“only seven, or else nine, such red heifers had been offered: the first by Moses, the second by Ezra, and the other five, or else seven, between the time of Ezra and that of the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans”. ¹⁰	In a peerless way, then, the heifer foreshadowed the “once and for all” sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:26).

There are many other aspects of this ritual that point to our Lord Jesus, for example the hyssop, cedarwood and scarlet. Suffice it to say that without the water of purification, which the heifer provided, the whole Mosaic Law would crumble. The priests would at some point come into contact with death and become defiled. They

could not do their jobs in an unclean state or they would be cut off for defiling the sanctuary, and their very offerings would become unclean and void (Lev. 21:1,2,11; Num. 19:13). The red heifer, therefore, was absolutely vital in order for tabernacle and temple worship to operate. Without the water of purification the people and priests

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

THE 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.