

THE AFTERMATH

(Chapters fifteen through nineteen)

The Message of Moses to the ‘Teen-agers’ in Israel (Numbers fifteen)

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “*When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, ---*”’” (Num. 15:1, 2). “*When you come into the land to which I bring you, . . . When you eat of the bread of the land,*” (Num. 15:18, 19).

The very first message God had for Israel after Kadesh–barnea was a bittersweet revelation. It was bitter for all those men over twenty, for they surely realized it was not for them! When the land was finally entered their bodies would be resting in sandy graves. It must have been sweet indeed to the teen-agers, for it was God’s assurance that, in spite of the failure of their parents and the judgment against them, God was going to keep His promise that their children would enter the land. He did not say, “*If* you enter the land,” but “*when* you enter it,” not “*If* you eat of the bread of the land,” but “*when*”! They realized that as a consequence of their parents’ rebellion they would spend many years in the wilderness, but they had a hope set before them that would ease the pain and bitterness of the long delay. They *would*, at last, feast on milk and honey! They would be sustained by this material, but nonetheless real, “blessed hope.”

These young people were not to change or ‘modernize’ the covenant under which their parents had failed so miserably, but they were to do a better job of keeping it than they had. There is little or nothing in this chapter that is not covered in Exodus or Leviticus, except the instructions concerning how they are to treat the strangers (“aliens” – NASB) who will be living among them. For a treatment of the typical significance of these offerings a study of Leviticus is suggested. It is worthy of note, however, that much covered in the first thirty-one verses of this chapter would be hard to carry out before they enter the land. Fine flour, oil, and wine would be difficult to obtain in the desert.

The consideration of strangers who would sojourn with them looks on to their lives in Palestine. The strangers are to follow the same laws as the Israelites. “One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.” (Num. 15:15, 16). This evidently assumes that the strangers will become proselytes, and keep the Law of Moses. Salvation is to be “of the Jews” (John 4:4). The strangers will be subject to God’s chastening (Num. 15:26), but they will also share in His forgiveness (Num. 15:30).

What a departure from this program is found in our day! Then salvation was of the Jews, and the strangers had to become proselytes to Judaism. Today, as even Peter admitted, the Jews must be saved “in the same manner” as the Gentiles – the “strangers” (Acts 15:11).

That God's law was not to be taken lightly was demonstrated when a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32 – 36). Many passages, including Exodus 35:2, taught that work was forbidden on the Sabbath, but only one verse related, even indirectly, to gathering sticks on that day (Ex. 35:3). Gathering a few sticks, when he had probably not yet built a fire, and with only one verse touching on the matter, may have seemed an insignificant matter. But, wisely, they sought God's verdict in the case (Num. 15:34). His judgment reminded them again that the Law was a ministration of death.

Crossing the Jordan was not going to deliver them from the harsh realities of the Law of Moses – even though, as it turned out later, Moses would no longer be among them to enforce it.

In verses thirty-seven through forty-one God graciously directs them to place tassels on the corners of their garments. These were not to be for mere ornamentation, but to remind them to remember and obey God's commandments. Thoughtful as this provision was, it falls far short of what He will one day do for redeemed Israel. In the day when all Israel will be saved He will not be satisfied to merely remind them to do His will, He will *cause* them to do it! “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and *cause* you to walk in My statutes, and you *will* keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:26, - 28).

The above passage in Ezekiel does not have this age of grace in view. However, when we come to Christ, we do enjoy - by grace - a generous sampling of what Israel will one day enjoy because God promised it to them. There are some differences however. We have the heart of flesh instead of stone but, sadly, we also still have the fleshly nature. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but He does not *cause* us to do God's will. Rather He *enables* us to do it when we walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh (Gal. 5:16). It will indeed be wonderful when God finally *causes* Israel to do His will. When that occurs, during the millennium, their battle will be over and the victory won. But when that takes place their opportunity to win rewards will be past. Medals of honor are not awarded for marching in the victory parade! Today we are still in the battle and there are rewards to be won! In our warfare it is not our garb, no matter how plain or how fancy, that reminds us to do God's will. It is the Word of God in our minds and the Spirit of God in our hearts that will be our constant and effective reminders.

The Rebellion of Korah (Numbers chapter sixteen)

In chapter fifteen God did what He could to assure Israel that – in spite of their rebellion and the resulting chastening – He had not cast away His people. Moses had told Pharaoh a couple of years before that Israel was His son. This chastening was solid proof of it (Heb. 12:4 – 8). One of the proverbs Solomon wrote much later would have been apropos at this time. “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:11, 12). While they were, indeed, not finding their discipline joyful,

but painful, they should have been willing to be “trained” by it so they could profit from the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11). Instead of becoming “partakers of [God’s] holiness” (Heb. 12:10), they became bitter and descended into an orgy of self-pity, blaming everyone but themselves for their plight. They exhibited no gratitude toward Moses for the many times he had saved them by his intercession on their behalf. Perhaps they did not know how close they had come to extinction or - if Moses had told them - they didn’t believe it. They have come to the conclusion that what they need is new leadership.

Does this sound familiar? How many times has a carnal and unresponsive congregation tried to prop up a sagging ministry by replacing their Board, or firing their pastor? New leaders may, at times, be helpful, but no matter how talented and gifted they may be, a change in leadership is no substitute for a church on its knees.

Let us follow the action as the passage reveals it to us. Three days of high drama and terrifying judgments unfold before our eyes before it is over.

On **day one** (Num. 16:1 – 17) the trouble broke forth. First *Korah* lead the attack on the *authority of Moses and Aaron* (v. 3), then *Dathan and Abiram* assaulted the *character of Moses* (vs. 13, 14). **Day two** (vs. 18 – 40) was a day of furious Judgments. On **day three** (vs. 41 – 50) the *entire congregation* accused Moses and Aaron of being *murderers* - responsible for the death of the rebels the day before.

Dathan, Abiram and On, all from the tribe of Reuben, and two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation as a whole, became involved in this new defiance. This was quite an imposing delegation, evidently composed of the strongest leaders and most respected men in Israel. Probably it was the influence of these very men that had encouraged the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea. As influential as these leaders were, this onslaught against Moses and Aaron was evidently instigated by Korah, a Levite and Kohathite (Num. 16:1, 2). He had enlisted the backing of these leaders from the various tribes under the enticing banner of ‘equal rights for all’ (Num. 16:3). He was promoting a simple ‘democracy’ to replace the leadership of Moses and Aaron (and the priests who were the sons of Aaron).

Since Christ has not yet begun His reign as King of kings, democracy is the most satisfactory form of human government today. Even in the political realm, however, democracy will only work to advantage in a basically godly society - as we are finding out to our sorrow. But Israel did have a King. They didn’t realize it, for He was not visibly sitting on a throne in their presence. He was their King nevertheless, as other Scripture attests. Later when Balaam described the camp of Israelites he declared, “The shout of a King is among them!” (Num. 23:21). Also, when Israel finally demanded a human king, God told Samuel, “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). The rejection of the leadership of Moses and Aaron here in the wilderness amounted to a rejection of God as their King!

Korah incited the leadership of the tribes to declare, “All the congregation is holy, every one of them” (Num. 16:3). It is instructive to see just who considered themselves

“holy.” It was the same people who turned back at Kadesh-barnea: an “evil congregation” (Num. 14:27), a people who would have been destroyed “as one man” (Num. 14:15) if Moses had not interceded, a congregation that, even then, were wandering in the wilderness because of their sin. A proverb of Solomon describes them well. “There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness” (Prov. 30:12). They were much like the Corinthians who prided themselves on their spirituality (1 Cor. 14:37) while, in reality, they were carnal - just babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1 – 3).

In spite of his public declaration for a ‘classless society’ it appears that Korah’s real purpose was to exalt the Levites to the priesthood that had been restricted to the sons of Aaron. They had been warned against this earlier (Num. 4:18 – 20). Moses rebuked him for resorting to this ‘power play.’ “Then Moses said to Korah, ‘Hear now, you sons of Levi: is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And *are you seeking the priesthood also?*’ ” (Num. 16:8 – 10). Korah was not a son of Aaron but, like Moses and Aaron, he was a Levite and also a Kohathite. The Kohathites had been given the very highest responsibility short of the priesthood. They were the ones who were entrusted with the exalted responsibility of hand-carrying the glorious furniture of the tabernacle. As all too often happens, the honor bestowed on them led to pride, and the pride fostered a lust for even higher honors.

It is this tendency of the flesh that Paul had in mind when he wrote, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business” (1 Thess. 4:11 - NASB). “The original expression is almost equivalent to ‘Be ambitious to be unambitious,’” as the footnote in W. J. Conybeare’s translation of this verse puts it. Not that we are to be lazy, but that we are to avoid the selfish pursuit of recognition, power, wealth, fame, and so forth. After urging us to present our bodies a living sacrifice to serve Christ, Paul issues a warning we dare not ignore. “I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). Faithfulness in conducting our “own business” – that for which God has given us the needed “measure of faith” - is greatly needed. God can do without the kind of ‘ambition’ noted here in those who carry on His work!

When Korah organized his ‘demonstration,’ and arrogantly faced Moses and Aaron with his accusations, he shouted, “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Num. 16:3). Moses fell on his face in shock and despair at this new evidence of rebellion in Israel. “*You* take too much upon *yourselves*, you sons of Levi!” he answered (Num. 16:7), and then arranged for a test to see who really belonged to God and was truly holy.

The issue was clear – did the leadership remain with Moses and Aaron, or would it be turned over to the congregation, and the leaders they put forth? He set forth a test

that left the decision in God’s hands. Since only the priests could offer incense, that was made the touchstone of the test. “[Moses] spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, ‘Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. Do this: take censers, Korah and all your company; put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!’” (Num. 16:5 – 7).

The terms of the test should have put these men in fear for their lives, for God had displayed His rejection of Nadab and Abihu, when they had offered incense with strange fire, by taking their lives – even though they were priests! (Lev. 10:2). Now these who are not even priests are directed to make themselves censers, put fire in them, and see if they will fare better than Nadab and Abihu.

Dathan and Abiram were also summoned to be present the next day (Num. 16:12). They not only refused to appear, they launched a verbal attack against the very character of Moses. They accused him of deceiving them with false promises of a land of plenty and luring them into the wilderness - usurping authority over them – just so he could kill them there. “Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey [their idealized recollection of Egypt!], to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? [Will you seek to prevent them from seeing your guilt?] We will not come up!” (Num. 16:13, 14).

These men were not even Levites, much less sons of Aaron, yet their charges are even more vicious than those of Korah. Moses became angry and prayed that the Lord would not recognize them as His, even if, and when, they brought offerings to Him. He then reminded Korah and his followers, along with Aaron, to gather before the Lord with their censers and incense the next day.

The **second day** of defiance (16:18 – 40) was a busy day! When the two hundred and fifty had assembled at the doorway of the tabernacle the glory of the Lord appeared to them all, but He was not on speaking terms with all of them. He spoke only to Moses and Aaron and warned them to separate themselves from the others so He could consume them instantly. Only the prayers of Moses and Aaron spared the lives of these insolent characters. Incense in Scripture is symbolic, or typical, of prayer. Here the incense from two hundred and fifty censers availed nothing. It was the prayers of but two men appointed and authorized by God that prevailed.

In answer to the prayers – the verbal ‘incense’ of Moses and Aaron - God turned from his threat to consume the congregation. He had not turned from his wrath against the bearers of incense or the perpetrators of the revolt however. He instructed Moses to “speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’” Then Moses went to Dathan and Abiram, followed by the elders of Israel.

Addressing the congregation that had gathered there he said, “Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins” (16:24 – 26).

Dathan and Abiram defiantly stood in the doorways of their tents with their entire families. “And Moses said: ‘By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD’” (Num. 16:28 – 30).

The resulting judgment must have been nearly as terrifying as the darkness and earthquake centuries later, when Christ was crucified. The very ground under the feet of the assembled Israelites must have shaken violently as the earth opened up and swallowed at least two families alive.¹ “Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly” (16:31 – 33). The onlookers watched in terror as they saw their friends drop from sight and heard their screams of anguish. It is no wonder that they fled and said, “Lest the earth swallow us up also!”

At about the same time that the earth was swallowing Dathan and Abiram “a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense” (16:35). The incense offered by so many self appointed ‘worshippers’ did not avail. They died in the very midst of the smoke from their censers.

Those offering the incense were not “holy” as had been claimed for them – their bodies were lying lifeless before the tabernacle. The censers they had used, however, were holy, for they had been presented before the Lord. They were salvaged for the Lord’s use. He directed that they be “hammered out as a covering on the altar” (v. 39). It is not clear whether the Altar of Incense or the bronze altar, where the animals were sacrificed, is in view. Since the covering was to be “a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD,” it seems logical that the Altar of Incense is intended. Also, unless the censers contained a considerable amount of bronze it would be difficult to construct anything of sufficient size to cover the much larger altar of sacrifice.

¹ The other leader of the rebellion, On, is not mentioned here. Everyone was warned to stay back from the tents of all three of the other men (v. 24), but in the next verse Moses went only to the tents of Dathan and Abiram. “All of the men who belonged to Korah” (NASB) were swallowed up, but it is not clear whether Korah himself shared their fate, or was slain with those who were offering incense. We are told later that the sons of Korah, unlike those of Dathan and Abiram, were not killed (Numbers 26:11).

The cover would not be over the Altar of Incense while it was in use in the tabernacle, but would be placed on top of the other coverings, designated earlier, when it was being transported. Thus those Israelites who were not priests, and were not allowed to see the Altar of Incense when it was in place in the tabernacle, could observe it covered with bronze when it was being carried by the Kohathites. Whenever they came close enough to see it they would be reminded that they must keep their distance, that for them to offer incense was a very important ‘No-No.’

On the **third day** the entire congregation accused Moses and Aaron of manslaughter. “On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against them, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the LORD’” (Num. 16:41). It almost seems they could hardly wait to be judged, as the others had been just the day before! Much as they may have mourned the passing of so many of their leaders, they had no reason to blame Moses and Aaron. Moses had pointed out to them that the fate decreed for Dathan and Abiram would be of such a nature that they could not be blamed. “And Moses said: ‘By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me’” (Num. 16:28, 29). The deaths of the two hundred and fifty ‘worshippers’ came about through a fire from the Lord, not by any human instrumentality. As a matter of fact, they would all have perished the day before if Moses and Aaron had not prayed for them.

The assembled Israelites so aroused the anger of the Lord that again He proposed slaying them all. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment’” (Num. 16:45). While almost fifteen thousand did die of the plague that God sent upon them, the rest were spared as Aaron stood between the living and the dead with incense rising from his censer.

Two hundred and fifty censers had not protected their bearers from the fire of the Lord the day before, but here only one censer brought the plague to a conclusion. They had complained about Aaron being the one to burn incense – but it was Aaron burning incense that turned away God’s wrath from the entire congregation! Since the incense from the censers is symbolic – typical of prayer ascending to God as a sweet aroma – this dramatic incident has much to teach us about prayer.

Many people praying (or one reciting many prayers) may not accomplish what one prayer can bring about, just as two hundred and fifty censers could not prevail – while one censer did. In prayer it is not quantity, but quality that counts. We are not heard for our many words (Matt. 6:7). One thing that can kill a prayer meeting is to have the same requests uttered, even in much the same words at times, by each one in the ‘prayer circle.’ When one member of the group ‘leads in prayer’ it is assumed that each of the others is saying ‘amen’ in their hearts to that request. Unless something additional needs to be presented to the Lord on that topic, someone else leading the same group with basically the same prayer is “vain repetition” as much as the redundancy of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ is in some circles.

There is nothing wrong with prayer to the true God – just as the censers were holy, even in the hands of unholy men. But prayer has its limitations. It is, in itself, not a cure-all. The oft-heard profession, “I believe in prayer” doesn’t go far enough. It misses the mark as the statement of adequate and true faith. Those who believed in incense died even while the incense was rising majestically from the censers in their hands.

Not only the existence, but the content, of prayer, is critical. The incense offered by the protesters could have been verbalized somewhat as follows. “Show Moses his pride and presumption, God, and put *us* in the place of prominence and power over the people.” Compare the self-exalting prayer of the Pharisee (it is said of him “thus he prayed *with himself*”!) with the self-effacing plea of the tax collector in Luke 18:10 – 14. It was not the Pharisee, but the lowly and despised publican, who went forth justified.

Several questions arise in regard to the content of our prayers. Are we to pray for the unsaved? It has been said, “Paul asks us to preach to the lost and pray for the saints, but we preach to the saints and pray for the lost.” This holds true as to the *emphasis* of Scripture. However Paul asks us to pray for all men, including those who have authority over us, for God desires that all men should be saved (1 Tim. 2:1 – 4). He set the example when he prayed for Israel – *that they might be saved* (Rom. 10:1).

Should we pray only for spiritual needs? It is true that the great majority of Paul’s references to prayer have to do with spiritual needs. The reason for this is not that we are to avoid praying about temporal matters, but that we need no prompting to pray for these matters. We do, however, need to be urged and reminded to pray for the spiritual needs. Just listen to the requests in most prayer meetings! Health, wealth and safety usually almost crowd out the kind of prayers Paul describes in his letters.

Should we then avoid praying for physical needs? Let Paul answer in his own words. “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, *that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe* –” (Rom. 15:30, 31). “Be anxious for nothing, but *in everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, *let your requests be made known to God*” (Phil. 4:6). “Prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that *through your prayers I shall be granted to you*” (Philemon 22).

The character of the one who is offering the prayer is important to God also. James touches on this point very clearly. “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). Although God is omniscient and knows every word of every prayer uttered, He *chooses not to hear* many of them. “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it *cannot* hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He *will not* hear” (Isa. 59:1, 2). In contrast, Israel is assured that during the Millennium - when they will all be saved and caused to walk in His statutes and observe His ordinances (Ezek. 36:27) - God will always hear them. “It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear” (Isa. 65:24).

The motivation for prayer is important as well. The fire used for the censers symbolizes this. The flame on the Bronze Altar was initially ignited when fire came out from before the Lord (Lev. 9:24), and it was never allowed to go out (Lev. 6:13). This was to be the source of any fire used in the censers (Num. 16:46). Nadab and Abihu offered incense before the Lord had ignited the blaze on the Bronze Altar. Instead of awaiting instructions from the Lord on the matter they used their own “strange fire” (Lev. 10:1 – KJV) and fire came out from the Lord and slew them. Just as the flame for the censers had to come from the Bronze Altar, all true motivation for prayer must come, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, from the cross – which the Bronze Altar typified.

There are many false motivations for prayer. Prayer offered to impress people is condemned by Christ (Matt. 6:5, 6). The Pharisee in the temple failed to impress God with his prayer (Luke 18:14). Prayer offered to gain that which we can consume upon our lusts will not avail (James 4:3). Prayer offered in meaningless repetition, just because it is part of a required ritual, is useless (Matt. 6:7). These are only a few examples of the ‘strange fire’ that we must avoid as we offer our ‘incense’ – our prayers – to the Lord.

Should unbelievers pray? It is true, they do not have the access to God that has been purchased for the believers (Rom. 5:2). However what God decides to do about this matter on an individual basis is totally up to God’s sovereign choice. There is at least one clear example of God hearing and appreciating, and responding to, the prayers of an unsaved man. Cornelius was “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). None of these things saved him. But God did hear his prayers (Acts 10:4) and responded as He saw fit. Cornelius had to hear the word of God before he could believe to the salvation of his soul, and the angel told him to send for Peter who would tell him “words by which *you* and all your household *will be saved*” (Acts 11:14).

In contrast Saul of Tarsus had been, as a strict Pharisee, *saying prayers* all his life, but it was only after he had been converted that the Lord said to Ananias, “Behold, he is *praying!*” (Acts 9:11). Lacking specific and clear revelation on a topic, we cannot put God in a box of our own making as to what He can or cannot do.

Aaron’s Rod (Numbers chapter seventeen)

The rebellion of Korah has been put down and the leaders of the insurrection have been destroyed. The authority of both Moses and Aaron has been upheld and the Levites have been frustrated in their play to take over the priesthood. The spirit of rebellion is still alive and well however, as the outbreak the very next day indicated.

Knowing that the people will continue, from time to time, to turn against His leaders God sought to give them an answer that will remain ever before them and, hopefully, be a preventive measure.

The Lord asked Moses to instruct the people to have a representative of each tribe select a rod and write their name on it. “You shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; *thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you*” (Num. 17:3 – 5).

When the rods were recovered the next day they were still dead rods except for that of Aaron. His rod had not only blossomed, it had born ripe almonds! Aaron's priesthood was vindicated by a manifestation of life out of death. The rod was then put back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that their complaints might be put away from before God, lest they die (Num. 17:10). Later Aaron's rod was actually placed within the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments (Heb. 9:1 – 4).

All of this looks forward to Christ. The ‘resurrected’ rod established Aaron's place as God's choice to be High Priest. So Christ, in resurrection, became a High Priest after the order of Melchizedec “according to the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16).

The resurrection of Christ declares Him to be “the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4). It sets Him apart from all other ‘religious leaders’ who have ever appeared on the world's scene. The other leaders lived their lives, had their say, gathered followers around them, and established their religions – but *they are dead!* **Christ lives!**

The resurrection of Christ is unanswerable evidence that what He did at Calvary has fully met every demand of God's holiness. All the sins of the entire world were laid on Him. If even one of those sins was not fully paid for on the cross, He would have continued in the grave. He was “delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Just as the reality of our offenses was the basis of His being delivered up to die as our substitute, so the perfection of the justification accomplished at Calvary was the basis for His resurrection. Christ had cried out, “It is *finished,*” and died. The Father responded with, “It is *enough!*” and raised Him from the dead.

It is because of this consideration that the resurrection was made a necessary part of the gospel by which we are saved (1 Cor. 15:1 – 4). This is why Paul tells us that men must believe in their hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, if they want to be saved (Rom. 10:9). It explains the prominence of the resurrection in the preaching of the apostles – including Paul (Acts 17:18; 1 Cor. 15:12 – 17).

The resurrection is also the basis for the believer's assurance that their salvation is secure. “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His [resurrection] life” (Rom. 5:10). “Therefore He is also able to save *to the uttermost* those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). He

who began the good work, in saving us from our sins, will be there to complete it – right up to and including the day He comes for us in the air (Phil. 1;6).

As we will see when we study chapter thirty-five of Numbers, the Israelite who had been guilty of manslaughter, when he fled to a “city of refuge,” was safe as long as the High Priest lived. Christ is both our city of refuge and our High Priest – and *He will never die!* Praise the Lord.

Resolution of the Priest versus Levite Dispute (Numbers chapter eighteen)

The rift between the priests and the Levites that was displayed in the rebellion of Korah against Aaron needs to be resolved. The insurrection was put down in Numbers sixteen with the death of Korah and his cohorts. The divinely appointed authority of Aaron was established in chapter seventeen with the budding of Aaron’s rod. Now steps are taken to forestall further friction between priests and Levites. This is the topic of chapter eighteen.

First of all, Aaron must realize that the authority he has been granted brings serious responsibility. “Then the LORD said to Aaron: ‘You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood’” (Num. 18:1). James calls our attention to the same principle. “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). In government, authority without proper recognition of responsibility breeds tyranny. It can come close to that in the Lord’s work also.

Also, if peace and productivity are to be preserved the work for which each group is responsible must be clearly defined. ‘Good fences make good neighbors’ - and clearly defined responsibilities make good co-laborers. Verses three to seven address this need. The Levites have their tasks to perform, but they are not to infringe on those delegated to the priests – lest they die! “I give your priesthood to you as a gift for service, but the outsider [anyone who is not a priest] who comes near shall be put to death” (verse 7).

Today we do not each have a detailed ‘job description,’ as did the priests and Levites, but we are urged to “think soberly” as to what our particular area of service is. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). This was the error of Aaron and Miriam in one instance and of Korah in another. Much confusion and strife could be avoided if we carefully followed Paul’s dictum.

God reminds the priests that the Levites are not their adversaries, or their slaves – they are God’s gift to them to help in their ministry (verse 6). The priests are not to infringe upon the ministry of the Levites either, for the priests have their own ministry as another gift from God (verse 7).

We also need to recognize that the ministry of others is not intended to be in competition with ours, but to supplement and strengthen it – their service is *our* gift from

God. When each saint is carrying on the ministry God has given to him, and appreciates the ministries of others, the work of the Lord can flourish in peace.

The priests are assured of a bountiful provision for their needs (verses 8 – 19). They are to be supported from their work (Compare 1 Cor. 9:14). “This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you” (Num. 18:9, 10). The firstborn of man and of unclean animals – that cannot be sacrificed – are to be redeemed with silver, and the silver will be theirs as well (verses 15, 16).

Great as the position and authority of Aaron was, he – like the rest of the Levites – would have no inheritance in the land (verse 20).

The Levites are to be supported also – from the tithes of the people (vs. 21 – 29). Then they are, in turn, to support the priests with their tithe – a “tithe of the tithe” (verse 26). The tenth they give to the priests is to be the best tenth of that which has been tithed to them. They are to be satisfied with the ‘leftovers’ (verses 31, 32). The principle followed, when the Levites give the best to the priests, is that what is given to them is given to God – and He deserves the best. Our support of the Lord’s work today is also our gift to God – and He should not be given the leftovers! The other side of the picture is that those in the Lord’s work who receive such gifts should recognize they are being entrusted with that which has been given to the Lord. They should be used honestly, carefully, wisely and, above all, prayerfully (2 Cor. 8:20, 21).

These instructions seem to have resolved the conflict between the priests and the Levites for, though the leadership of Moses was attacked again in chapter twenty-one, no further division between priest and Levite is recorded in Numbers.

The Red Heifer (Numbers chapter nineteen)

It is significant that there is no mention of the Red Heifer in either Exodus or Leviticus, and that it appears here only after Israel has been sentenced to thirty-eight more years in the wilderness. It was apparently a provision specifically for those long years now ahead of them. The particular uncleanness emphasized in this chapter is brought about by some contact with death. “He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. ... Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days” (19:11, 16). The uncleanness will be considered serious. “Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD. *That person shall be cut off from Israel*” (19:13).

They will have many such contacts in the next 38 years, for at least 603,548 men will die – to say nothing of the women and children who may die natural deaths, and enemies slain in battle (Num. 31:19). The instruction given earlier for the one who

became unclean was to bring a lamb or a goat as a sin offering (Lev. 5:6). With a rock-bottom average of 44 deaths a day (just from the doomed 603,548 men) for the next 38 years it would be quite literally impossible for them to be cleansed if an offering had to be made for each one. Making one offering effective for all future cleansings solved this problem.

However the typology of the passage is what demands our closest attention. Like all of the Old Testament offerings, the heifer pictures Christ in His death. An old hymn says it well.

“Not all the blood of beasts, on Jewish altars slain,
 Could give the guilty conscience peace, or wash away one stain.
 But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, took all our guilt away,
 A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.”²

Several aspects of the Red Heifer offering, as they foreshadow Calvary, deserve our special attention.

First of all, this is the only sacrificial offering that is not set out in the book of Leviticus. As a matter of fact I find no further specific reference to it until it finds its place in the book of Hebrews. Just as it was a special provision for the recently extended time on the wilderness trail in Numbers, it typifies Christ as a provision for us in our walk today. We will enlarge on this facet of it later.

Secondly, as noted in our study of chapter nine, it is a once-for-all sacrifice. The Passover was also a once-for-all sacrifice. This is not generally recognized, for the Israelites offered up Passover lambs every year. However, strictly speaking, there was but one true Passover. In the years following they recalled it by a Passover *celebration* in which lambs were offered. But only once in their history were their firstborn in danger of death. Only once did God pass over their homes while visiting death on their heathen neighbors. After the Passover in Egypt they were, nationally, a redeemed people – and they recalled this fact, and the sacrifice bringing it about, each year. The Passover typifies Christ’s one offering as regards redemption from the guilt of sin, while the Heifer speaks of His one offering for cleansing from the defilement of sin.

There was only one Red Heifer *as far as the Scriptures record*. Evidently, in practice, they eventually ran out of ashes and offered another one. Scripture is silent here. Today there is a concerted effort among fundamentalist Jewish leaders to find just the right heifer to offer so this source of cleansing may be reinstated when they again have their temple. They should be looking for the fulfillment of the type, not a duplication of it – for Christ is the only source of cleansing God has for them today.

The once for all character of Christ’s death is emphasized in the context where the offering of the Red Heifer is mentioned in Hebrews. “With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place *once for all*, having obtained *eternal* redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the *ashes of a heifer*, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for

² “The Believers Hymn Book” – Pickering and Inglis, hymn number 170 on page 150.

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. 9:12 – 14). “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. ... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:10, 14).

Another aspect of Calvary emphasized in the Red Heifer offering is the fact that His death was to be at the hands of an unbelieving Israel and their wickedly murderous leaders. This is why, even though the heifer was to be perfect, the place where it was offered was to be a clean place, and the very purpose of it was for cleansing -- everyone who had anything to do with it became *unclean* until the evening. Peter echoed this emphasis when he addressed those who had crucified Christ. “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know; Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, *you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death*” (Acts 2:22, 23).

Now let us consider the passage with these items in mind.

“This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come’” (Num. 19:2).

Scripture teaches that only a man can take the place of a man, as his substitute. This appears to be one of the lessons taught by the sacrifice of Isaac. While God instructed Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, it was never His intention that He would allow him to go through with it. In Micah 6:7 the question, “Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” implies a strong negative answer from God. Three times in Jeremiah God tells His people that it had never entered His mind that they should give their children as sacrifices, as did the worshippers of Baal (Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

Why, then, did God ask Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering? He had a dual message to typify. First of all He made it clear, as noted above, that animal offerings were not the final answer to sin. No animal could be an adequate substitute for a man. The sin of man could only be paid for by the death of a *man*. Then, when He did not allow Abraham to go through with the sacrifice, He revealed that not just any man would do. Not even the miracle-born son of Abraham, the great man of faith, would do! Only God’s Son is qualified to be that man.³

The man chosen to be the sacrifice must have a life of infinite value or it would suffice for only one sinner. He must also be without sin of his own, otherwise his death

³ What a difference exists between the heart of God and the heart of man! When Abraham’s hand was raised to take the life of Isaac, God stopped him. But when, centuries later, it was God’s Son whose life was at stake, men cried out, in effect, “Go ahead, kill Him, crucify Him.”

would only care for his own sins. Christ is the only one who meets these requirements. Being God, His life has the infinite value required, and He was totally without sin.

The heifer was to be without blemish. This refers, of course, to the sinlessness of Christ. That He was sinless is crystal clear in Scripture. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). Only He could ask, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46) without fear of facing condemnation. At His trial and crucifixion even his enemies bore testimony to His innocence. Pilate’s wife told him, “Have nothing to do with that just Man” (Matt. 27:19). The centurion in charge of the crucifixion, and those under him who carried it out, when they saw what happened at His death, became terrified. They cried out, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54). The centurion added “This Man has done nothing wrong.” (Luke 23:41). Judas, in his remorse, confessed to the chief priests and elders, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Matt. 27:4). Neither Herod nor Pilate, the judge in the ‘trial,’ could find fault with Him. Pilate confessed, “I have found no fault in his Man ... neither did Herod ... indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him” (Luke 23:14, 15). Yet, as typified in Numbers nineteen, they took Him outside the city (the “camp”) and murdered Him.

Not only was the heifer to be without blemish, but one “on which a yoke has never been placed” (Num. 19:2 – NASB). This was not to be a work animal. Clearly, the lesson to be learned is that it was not the work of Christ – the three years of matchless ministry previous to Calvary – but His death that would cleanse away sin. Some today laud Christ as the master teacher, the compassionate healer, and the perfect example - all of which He certainly was - but apart from His sacrificial death He could not be the *Savior!*

The heifer was to be taken outside the camp to be “slaughtered.” To fully appreciate the significance of the heifer being slain “outside the camp” we need to ponder two issues: where the sacrifice should normally have taken place, and why it was not accomplished there.

Surely, in the New Testament, if Israel had really believed John the Baptist, and had welcomed Jesus as the Messiah instead of rejecting Him, His death would still be necessary. Otherwise their faith could not have saved them. Their salvation, and ours, would have been rendered impossible by deleting the death of the only one qualified to be the substitute for sinful men. But where, and how, would He have died?

Other offerings were made at the brazen altar, located at the entrance of the tabernacle, in the very heart and center of the camp.⁴ The Lord had warned Moses, “Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from among his people” (Lev.

⁴ The carcass of the sin offering was burned outside the camp (Lev. 4:12) but it was slain at the brazen altar, where only the fat and some selected organs were burnt (Lev. 4:8 – 10).

17:8, 9). If it were not for the unbelief and rejection of Israel Christ surely would have gone, voluntarily, to that altar and there, with believing Israel looking on through tear dimmed eyes, submitted to death. That death could have been at the hand of God personally (as Isaac's would have been by the hand of his father if God had not intervened). Or it could have been brought about through the instrumentality of the High Priest as God's representative (as was the case with the other offerings). Then, after three days, He would have appeared again, in resurrection, before his nation and sent them out with the glorious news of redemption. Israel would then have become what God had intended from the beginning, and what they will even yet be in a future day, His witnesses. "‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He’" (Isa. 43:12).

But was not Israel's rejection of Him, and His shameful death on a cross, clearly foretold? Yes, of course, in both prophecy and type. But the *murder* of Christ did not occur because it was prophesied. It was prophesied because God foresaw it would occur. Prophecy does not determine events – God's foreknowledge of events determines prophecy. To think that prophecy *determines* coming events denies any real *foreknowledge* on God's part. God does not "foreknow" what will happen only because He knows *He will cause it to happen*. No matter how it is dressed up with theological jargon, this would make God the author of sin!

So the Red Heifer being offered outside the camp indicated that God knew Israel would reject His Son and take His death into their own hands. Peter makes this clear in Acts 2:23. "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God [God's part], you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death [man's part]." No wonder the very priest in charge of this ceremony became unclean!

"You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be brought outside the camp and be slaughtered in his presence. Next Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times" (Num. 19:3, 4 - NASB).

Notice the priest was not the one to slay the heifer, but it was to be slain in his presence ("before him" – NKJV). This was not the procedure followed in other sacrifices. Who did kill the animal? It does not tell us, but in the fulfillment of the type Christ was not crucified by the priest, but by the Romans. However, it was done before the priest – with his full knowledge and at his active instigation. This principle is illustrated later in Israel's history. David did not so much as touch Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, but Nathan told him, "You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword ... of the people of Ammon" (2 Sam. 12:9). Likewise the leaders of Israel did not nail Christ to the cross, but they are held guilty of His murder (Acts 7:52).

The priest then took some of the blood with his finger and sprinkled it seven times toward the front of the tabernacle, where the brazen altar was located. Symbolically he was saying, "That is where it *should* have been done! That is where it *should* have been done! That is where --- !" In fulfillment of this typology Christ did not

die gloriously in the heart of Jerusalem, He was murdered in shame and rejection outside the gate.

This may have been at least a part of the “cup” Christ was praying about in Gethsemane. “In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:7, 8). He had come for the very purpose of dying for sinful men, but must He submit to being *murdered* by them? Degrading though this would be, in His perfect humanity “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, *even the death of the cross*” (Phil. 2:8). He prayed, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” What submission to the Father’s will, what wonderful grace, what love for us, what concern for the very ones who crucified Him was demonstrated when He uttered those simple words!

It is this very self-humbling Paul had in mind when he said, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). When He had every right to expect those for whom He was suffering to appreciate it and give Him honor, they were screaming their hatred and contempt. While they were spitting at Him, cursing Him and pouring out abuse against Him He was loving them, suffering for them and praying for them. There may be times when we, too, will be humiliated, abused and derided by those we are seeking to reach for Christ. May we be enabled, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, to have the mind of Christ at such a time.

“Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer” (Num. 19:5, 6).

The priest himself did not burn the animal but, as in the taking of its life, it was done in his presence and at his instigation. So as Christ was dying on the cross, pouring out His matchless life to the last heartbeat, the Jewish leaders were there watching Him die. They were not physically killing Him, but they were responsible for His death and were smug in their satisfaction that they had rid themselves of this challenge to their power and authority.

The heifer was burned up totally. There was nothing left but ashes. Many of the offerings specified by the law provided for the needs of the priests. When they ate the meat of an animal that had been sacrificed, it typified the believer feasting on Christ. When they were given the skin, it pictured the believer dressed in the righteousness of Christ, as Adam was clothed with coats of skins. But in this offering there was nothing to meet the priests’ physical needs. When the day was done only the ashes were left. Even these were not for them because they were priests, but only because they were in need of cleansing. The cleansing was available even for the priest who had superintended this sacrifice. So the salvation purchased at Calvary was available even for those who had crucified Him - if they had only availed themselves of it. What wonderful grace!

The priest was to take cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet material and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer (v. 6). These same items were associated with the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14:4). Since leprosy is a clear type of sin, does this not at least hint at the truth voiced by Paul, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf” (2 Cor. 5:21)?

“The one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening” (Num. 19:8).

This offering was for cleansing, yet everyone who had anything to do with it became unclean. Not only the priest who was “in charge” became unclean, so did the one who burned the animal. Since this aspect of it reflects the part the Romans had at the crucifixion it indicates they also bore responsibility for the death of Christ. Those who are so vocal in laying responsibility for the death of Christ at the door of the Jews need to remember the entire story.

The soldiers, who put a crown of thorns on His head, placed a purple robe on Him and bowed before Him in derision of His claim to be a king, were Gentiles. Those who spat on Him and beat Him on the head and about the face (Matt. 27:31; John 19:2, 3), were Gentiles. Those who nailed Him to the cross, gambled for His clothing while they watched Him die (John 19:23, 24) and then thrust a spear into His side before they took Him down from that cross, were Gentiles! The very judge who had Christ flogged to within an inch of His life and, knowing Him to be innocent, sent Him to His death (Matt. 27:26), was a Gentile. It was not the Jews alone, nor only the Gentiles, who crucified Christ. All mankind must bear the blame. “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:10). It was for sinful mankind He laid down His life and it is to sinful mankind that He offers His salvation.

We, too, share the blame for the death of Christ, since it was our sins that made it necessary. Our initial unbelief was as ugly in God’s sight as that of the Pharisees and Saducees. Yet God loved all of us ⁵ and gave His Son over to the shame and agony of Calvary that we might be forever cleansed from sin and might share His matchless life.

“Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin” (Num. 19:9).

Since the ashes were used for cleansing, it was necessary for anyone who was unclean to go outside the camp to obtain it. This indicates that the camp itself was not clean. The tabernacle, with its priests, its offerings and its rituals, was still located in the

⁵ John 3:16 does not teach that God had an emotional attachment to the world, but that He longed for those in it to be saved. The word here is not *phileo*, but *agapao*. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 1:4). He made it possible by giving His Son. If they do not obtain everlasting life it will be because they did not believe.

camp – but cleansing was in a *clean* place, outside. The writer of Hebrews called upon the Jews of his day to forget the temple, and its priests - who were arrayed against God by their rejection of the Savior - and go outside the gate (of the city – the “camp” of that day) for cleansing. “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp.⁶ Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:10 – 13).

The Ethiopian Eunuch illustrates this. He was just returning from Jerusalem, where he had gone as a proselyte to worship at the temple. It was not there, however, but far “outside the gate” that he found the Savior (Acts 8:25 – 39). Also Saul of Tarsus, who had all the access to the temple available to a non-Levite, found his cleansing far “outside the gate” on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1 – 6). Today, tragically, many are in a position where they must go outside of their particular church, and often bear reproach for it, to hear the gospel. Any “camp” where Christ is in rejection must be forsaken. We, too, must “go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

Christ should have been allowed to lay down His matchless life in the heart of Jerusalem, the “city of God.” Instead He was taken outside the camp of Israel to die. This was a shame to Israel, and they are *blamed* for the cross. But when He was taken outside the camp of Judaism He was brought out where we Gentiles were. This is one reason we *glory* in the cross!

“And for an unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave” (Num. 19:17, 18).

While the sacrifice of the heifer was a once for all event, its value was made available to the unclean for years to come. When one became polluted by sin he did not have to offer a heifer, he was just sprinkled with water that had been run through the ashes of the one already offered.

The water symbolizes the word of God (Eph. 5:26) in the hands of the Spirit of God. There is a very close association between the word of God and the Spirit of God. This is illustrated by the way Abraham obtained a bride for Isaac (Gen. 22). He, typical in the story of God the Father, sent the servant, typical of the Holy Spirit, to obtain a bride for Isaac, a type of Christ. When the servant found Rebecca she was by the well of water. That fact is emphasized in the text. The well and the water found there are mentioned at least eight times. That is where the Holy Spirit found me – by the well of water!

⁶ “The bodies of the sin-offering beasts were burned outside the camp, not because they were unfit for a holy camp but, rather, because an unholy camp was an unfit place for a holy sin-offering.” -- The Revised Scofield Bible, note on Lev. 4:12.

However a man may have full access to the word of God, and even hear it taught faithfully and preached powerfully, and still be lost forever. He may even experience conviction for sin and still not be saved. What is lacking? He must *believe* the record of what Christ has done for him – he must have *faith in Christ* (Eph. 2:8, 9).

The faith is symbolized in Numbers nineteen by the hyssop mentioned in verse eighteen. “A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave.” Earlier in Israel’s history hyssop was used to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts in Egypt (Ex. 12:22). There it spoke of how the death of the lamb was of no value to the firstborn unless it was applied to his house. So all that Christ did on Calvary is of no value to the sinner until it is applied to his heart by faith. He must not think of Christ only as one who died on a cross, but as the One who died *for him* on a cross, the One who took **his** place and paid **his** debt of sin. So, too, as typified in the story of the Red Heifer, the hyssop of faith is needed to apply the cleansing water of the word to his life. But how does faith come? “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the *word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). Where does the Spirit come into the picture? He inspired the word and He is the one who brings conviction to the heart of the one hearing it.

The water that was added to the vessel containing the ashes was to be “running water,” literally, “*living* water.” What a remarkable symbol for the word of God! In a chapter full of references to death it is *living* water that is used for cleansing! So eternal life comes to the sinner as the Spirit of God brings the word of Christ’s death and resurrection to his heart with convicting and converting power.

Cleansing for the saint comes through the same instrumentality. When the believer sins, Christ does not have to die again. When he admits his sin to himself and to God (1 Cor. 11:31) the merits of the once for all sacrifice are applied through the living water, the word of that death (Heb. 9:13, 14), and he is cleansed (1 John 1:9). There is no need for the continuing and repeated death of Christ that is said to take place in the Roman Catholic “mass.” Nor is there any need for the wayward saint to be saved all over again. The one sacrifice is sufficient!⁷

“He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean” (Num. 19:11, 12 – KJV).

As noted before, this chapter focuses on those who were present and consenting to Christ’s crucifixion. Everyone who had anything to do with this sacrifice became

⁷ When David sinned with Bathsheba he did not lose his salvation. It was the joy of that salvation he cried out for. With this chapter in Numbers no doubt in mind, he prayed, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psa. 51:7, 12).

unclean, even though its express purpose was cleansing. Anyone who touched the corpse of a dead person became unclean for seven days. He was to be cleansed on the third day and the seventh day. If he missed the third day cleansing the seventh day cleansing was not available to him, and he would be cut off from his people.

Christ was raised from the dead on the *third* day, and the number *seven* is the number of completeness and perfection. Those who were present and consenting to the death of Christ, by that very presence and consent, “touched” the dead body of Christ and became unclean. After three days Christ rose from the dead and they were given the opportunity to repent, believe on Him and be cleansed from their sin. “You denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses ... Repent ... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:14, 15, 19).

Those who availed themselves of that “third day cleansing” will be raised from the dead at the close of the Tribulation when Israel’s program will reach “seventh day” completeness and perfection (Rev. 11:18). Then they will receive the second cleansing and be a part of the “all Israel” that Paul says will be saved then (Rom. 11:26). This seventh day cleansing is described in Ezekiel. “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will *sprinkle clean water* on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:24 – 28).

This seems to be what Peter had in mind in his first epistle when he wrote to the Jewish believers of his day. “[You] are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed *in the last time*. ... Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 1:5, 13).

Those who crucified Christ, but rejected God’s gracious offer of cleansing after His resurrection, will not be present when all Israel will be saved. Their generation met severe physical judgment just a few years later, at the hands of the Romans, and the unbelievers among them will be eternally cut off from their people. There will be no “seventh day cleansing” for them. They missed the “third day cleansing.”

There is a principle here that demands attention. Just as there will be no second chance for those Israelites missing the third day cleansing, there will be no second chance for any today who leave this life without having placed their faith in the risen Christ. We, as believers, will experience a “seventh day cleansing” when the Lord calls us home and we are finally free from the old nature and all it represents. Then we shall be presented before Him “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but ... [we will be] holy and without blemish” (Eph. 4:27). We, too, are “kept by the power of God through

faith,” for “He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). However we are not awaiting the last times of Israel’s program. We “eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20, 21). This “seventh day” culmination of our salvation will take place at the Rapture.

One last message from this remarkable chapter deserves our notice. The uncleanness depicted all through it is “catching.” When anyone died in a tent, everyone in the tent, everyone who came into it later, and even any vessel in it without a cover, became unclean (Num. 19:14, 15). Sin is depicted here as virulent in its spreading of contamination. Even one who touched something that had been touched by an unclean person became unclean! (Num. 19:22). Uncleanness is “catching!” It is both contagious and infectious. Jude warns of this in verses 22 and 23 of his letter. “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”

It is at least partly for this reason that we are warned against close relationships with believers who are still enslaved by sin. Paul warned the Corinthians, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). He then went on to say, “I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person” (1 Cor. 5:11). We must have love and compassion for the erring brother, but we must also beware of “catching” his spiritual ailment! May we so live before those around us that our *faith* will be catching!

How different was Christ! His *righteousness* was “catching!” He touched the leper but did not become unclean. Instead the leper became clean. He came into the presence of a corpse, the daughter of Jairus, and took her by the hand (Mark 5:41), but He did not become unclean. Instead He brought the girl to life. He sat by a well and talked with an immoral woman, and her life was transformed. Our closest relationship must be with Him whose very fellowship brings cleansing and godliness.