

NUMBERS

Chapter 19

Laws for Purification

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 2 “This is the statute of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the people of Israel to bring you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish, and on which a yoke has never come. 3 And you shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered before him. 4 And 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. 5 And the heifer shall be burned in his sight. Its skin, its flesh, and its blood, with its dung, shall be burned. 6 And the priest shall take cedarwood and hyssop and scarlet yarn, and throw them into the fire burning the heifer. 7 Then the priest shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. But the priest shall be unclean until evening. 8 The one who burns the heifer shall wash his clothes in water and bathe his body in water and shall be unclean until evening. 9 And a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and deposit them outside the camp in a clean place. And they shall be kept for the water for impurity for the congregation of the people of Israel; it is a sin offering. 10 And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. And this shall be a perpetual statute for the people of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourns among them. 11 “Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days. 12 He shall cleanse himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean. But if he does not cleanse himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become clean. 13 Whoever touches a dead person, the body of anyone who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from Israel; because the water for impurity was not thrown on him, he shall be unclean. His uncleanness is still on him. 14 “This is the law when someone dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is in the tent shall be unclean seven days. 15 And every open vessel that has no cover fastened on it is unclean. 16 Whoever in the open field touches someone who was killed with a sword or who died naturally, or touches a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. 17 For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt sin offering, and fresh[a] water shall be added in a vessel. 18 Then a clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there and on whoever touched the bone, or the slain or the dead or the grave. 19 And the clean person shall sprinkle it on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day. Thus on the seventh day he shall cleanse him, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and at evening he shall be clean. 20 “If the man who is unclean does not cleanse himself, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, since he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. Because the water for impurity has not been thrown on him, he is unclean. 21 And it shall be a statute forever for them. The one who sprinkles the water for impurity shall wash his clothes, and the one who touches the water for impurity shall be unclean until evening. 22 And whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean, and anyone who touches it shall be unclean until evening.”

19:2 *red heifer.* The qualifying words, “without defect or blemish,” are familiar in contexts of sacrificial worship in the OT. But this is not a sacrificial animal. It is a cow, not an ox; it is to be slaughtered, not sacrificed; and it is to be killed outside the camp, not at the holy altar. The ashes of the red heifer (v. 9) are the primary focus of this act, for they will be used in the ritual of the water of cleansing. The burning of the animal with its blood and offal (v. 5) is unprecedented in the OT. The normal pattern for the sacrifice of the burnt offering is given in Lev 1:3–9. In every respect the killing of the red heifer is distinct: A female animal was taken outside the camp to be killed; the priest had to be present, but he did

not identify himself with it; and a bit of the heifer's blood was sprinkled from the priest's finger toward the tabernacle seven times, but the rest of the animal was to be burned in its entirety, without the draining of its blood or the cleansing of its offal. (CSB)

Reddish brown heifer (cow that had never been bred). No reason is given why the color of the sacrificial animal had to be red. (TLSB)

19:5 *its dung*. Undigested food in the animal's bowels. (TLSB)

19:6 *cedarwood, hyssop and scarlet yarn*. Associated with the cleansing properties of the ashes of the red heifer. (CSB)

Materials used in the purification from leprosy were added to the fire. (TLSB)

19:9 *water for impurity*. Water with the ash may have formed a weak lye solution. (TLSB)

impurity. Hbr word describes the ceremonial uncleanness incurred by a woman's "discharge of blood" (Lv 15:25). (TLSB)

19:11–13 Contact with corpses or animal carcasses rendered the Israelites ritually unclean (Lv 5:2; 11:24–28; 21:1–4, 10–11; 22:4–7; Nu 6:6–12). The death of many in "the affair of Korah" (16:49) called for special measures of purification. The defilement was to be removed by the application of ritually prepared water. *cleanse himself ... thrown on him*. Washing by having water poured or dumped on the person requires less water than immersion. See p 1370. Cyprian: "It appears that the sprinkling also of water prevails equally with the washing of salvation" (ANF 5:401) (TLSB)

19:12 *cleanse himself with the water*. The ashes from the red heifer were kept outside the camp and would be mixed as needed with water to provide a means of cleansing after contact with dead bodies. (CSB)

19:13 *defiles the LORD's tabernacle*. Willful neglect of the provision for cleansing brought not only judgment on the person, but also a pollution of the tabernacle itself. (CSB)

19:14 *everyone who is in it*. There would be many occasions in which a person would become unclean, not because of deliberate contact with a dead body, but just by being in the proximity of one who died. (CSB)

19:18 *hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle*. Here the method of the cleansing ritual is explained. A ceremonially clean person had to sprinkle the ceremonially unclean person or thing. The cleansing power of the blood of Christ is specifically contrasted ("much more"; Heb 9:13–14) with the cleansing effectiveness of the water of the ashes of the red heifer. Cf. *cut off from his people* in Lev 7:20 and note. (CSB)

19:20 *thrown on him*. All rites to achieve ceremonial cleanness and purification of the flesh would not have spanned the gap between the holy God and sinful humankind if they had not pointed to the only acceptable sacrifice: Christ Jesus, who "offered Himself without blemish to God" (Heb 9:13–14). (TLSB)

Ch 19 God provides a means to cleanse those who had touched a corpse or accidentally come in contact with a bone of a dead person or a grave. Such a rite of purification foreshadows the cleansing power of Baptism. • Father of grace, we remember our Baptism and how You made us clean through water and the Word. Amen. (TLSB)