

**The Greatest Gift of All: The Ashes of a Red Heifer**  
Hebrews 9:13-14

There are those moments in life when we really blow it. There are poor decisions we make, foolish actions we take, and even laws we break (both God's and man's) that result in guilt, hurt, and defilement. *"If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us"* (1 John 1:9). How? *"For if the blood of goats and bulls and **the ashes of a heifer** sanctify the flesh... how much more will the blood of Christ ... cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* (Hebrews 9:12-13).

**I. Our appreciation for Christ grows in proportion to our knowledge of the Old Testament.**

In Numbers 19 we read about "The ordinance of the Red Heifer." Video games won't teach you this. Describing the type of the red heifer causes us to see how God gave Old Covenant glimpses of Christ.

**A. Ceremonial defilement barred a Hebrew from worship.**

*"The ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been [ceremonially] defiled cleanses"* (v. 13).

Hebrew ceremonies revolved around the sacrifices, feasts and festivals at the Tabernacle/Temple.

A Hebrew could be defiled and unable to worship because of *contact with death* (Numbers 19).

*"Anyone who touches a corpse ... and does not purify himself ... shall be cut off"* (Numbers 19:13).

Death best pictures sin because death destroys "the bloom of beauty and the dignity of strength."

A Hebrew in contact with death (sin) was a common, frequent and often unexpected event in life.

So too we, the people of God, often find ourselves in an unexpected place because of our sins.

**B. Ceremonial cleansing involved the ashes of a red heifer.**

This is the subject of Numbers 19. The heifer is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ and His death.

1. The red heifer was killed before the uncleanness was committed (19:3).

So Christ died for us long ago, before we had lived to commit the sin for which He died.

2. The red heifer was a young calf without spot or blemish (19:2).

So Jesus was a young man, without sin or guile, when He became our sacrifice at Calvary.

3. The red heifer was slain outside the camp of the Hebrews (19:3).

So Jesus died "outside the city gates" (Hebrews 13:12), in fulfillment of the law of God.

4. One red heifer died for the entire nation (19:2).

There is *no other name under heaven given to men whereby we can be saved* (Acts 4:12).

5. The entire red heifer was totally burned up—skin, flesh, blood, dung, everything (19:5).

So too Christ became sin for us and gave His all at the cross of Calvary.

6. The ashes of the red heifer were gathered and used by individual defiled Hebrews.

Just as the blood of Christ needs personal appropriation, so too, a Hebrew defiled by touching death, would send for some ashes, mixed with water, and be sprinkled.

7. The defiled were cleansed by the sprinkling of the ashes via the use of hyssop (19:19).

The hyssop is a flowered, semi-woody plant used in purification rites of the Hebrews.

Hyssop is always a picture of faith. *"Be gracious to me, O God... blot out my sins. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow"* (Psalm 51:1,3,7).

**II. The cleansing of my conscience by Christ compels me to serve the living God.**

This is the message of Christmas. Christ came to earth (Emmanuel). He offered Himself for us.

When we feel ourselves guilty, when we know ourselves defiled, we come by faith to Jesus Christ.

A. How much greater the blood! The Hebrew went into the courtyard; we go into the palace.

B. How much greater the cleansing! We can *know* we are right with God (Hebrews 9:9 vs. 9:14).

C. How much greater the transformation! Whereas in the Old Testament it might have been difficult to discern the differences between the defiled person and the undefiled person, in the New Testament there is a great difference between the two. The cleansed sinner serves God Himself.