

The water of separation required the sacrifice of a special cow, a red heifer without blemish, and which had never worked under the yoke, which was to be sacrificed in order for the arrangements for those unclean amongst the nation to be purified. God wants us to notice this.

There are a number of unique elements which are involved in this sacrifice. First the place of the offering was not in the tabernacle itself but outside the camp. The blood would be used to manufacture the water of separation which would itself be used to cleanse the altar, so it would be strange for the sacrifice to be made there. Without the camp reminds all the congregation that the camp itself defiles because of the presence of people. All mankind is under the condemnation, even Jesus was, and therefore in need of physical cleansing. Only once this has been achieved can the ashes be purified in order to fulfil its role, as a general cleansing agent for sin.

Secondly it was not the High Priest, Aaron, who made the offering but Eleazar, his son, the high priest designate. This should remind us that when the Lord Jesus made his offering, he was not yet the High Priest of the age to come, as the Aaronic line was still in place. The Aaronic order had been set up by God and would only be removed by Him. This was only fully accomplished when God permitted the temple to be destroyed and for all animal sacrifice to be stopped in AD70, this was some 40 years after the crucifixion. Jesus became High Priest, he was not born into that role, but he was the High Priest designate, as God had indicated that the Messiah would be a Priest upon his throne, see Zechariah 6v13. The work was done before the elevation to a higher office.

The fact that the dung of the red heifer was also burned is instructive. This was not normal. Dung is used for domestic fires and cooking but it is unclean. That all aspects of the animal were to be burned and used in the preparation of the water of separation should remind us that we have no special part of us that is better than the rest, the whole being, dung and all, is condemned. The dung is only condemned because it comes out of man, as Matthew 15v11, 17-20 indicates. Out of defiled flesh, came glory!

In addition to all these elements of the animal other ingredients were added to be burned to make the ashes. These were cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet. These are all natural ingredients and part of God's creation which was made for the benefit of mankind, and although under the curse, not naturally defiling. The same three ingredients were used in the cleansing of the leper in Leviticus 14. Leprosy speaks of actual sins and transgressions not inherited sin or human nature.

The cedar suggests strength, as Psalm 92v12 says *"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon"*. The cedar wood was also used for structural building work in ancient Israel, particularly special buildings like the temple or a palace, see 1 Kings 6v9-36. Spoken of eight times. It is God not man who supplies the strength needed in the formation of the cleansing agency, which strengthened the whole man of the sacrifice.

Psalm 51v7 informs that Hyssop was used in purging – *"Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow"*. It is God not man who provides the purging element of the cleansing agency, but the whole man embraced

the purging God gave. It can also grow in unexpected places, see 1 Kings 4v33, out of the wall! The Messiah came from an unexpected source even though it had been prophesied about him!

Scarlet is a dye which comes from crushed worms or shells. It speaks of God's provision of rare intensity, value from concentration. It is not the colour red, as the heifer itself was, which is the Hebrew *adom* or *adam*, meaning ruddy or earthy, as the colour of soil often is in some climes, including the Levant. God supplies the concentration and focus within the process that brought the success, not man, but it was still done as blended with the whole man. God ensured that Jesus was given the scarlet covering, Matthew 27v28 (the only gospel which speaks of this) which was meant as an insult – a King being crucified but was actually so fitting! All focus was on him as it should be!

Without the extra provision of these three ingredients then the ashes would only have been of a dead heifer. These extra elements enhanced what was being done and went beyond the actual animal, Christ was more than mere man! He was God enhanced in ways that boosted the sacrifice and did not devalue it. God knows what He is doing, and the detail of such passages reminds us to consider every jot and tittle.

The actions of Eleazar defiled him. He was to be unclean until the evening. So also, it was with Christ. He became defiled by being hung on a tree, something the Law cursed, Galatians 3v13. But he was also the sacrifice not just the priest! He was defiled in several different ways but never by actual personal transgression. To say that was his only defilement as some have said is dangerously wrong.

The water of separation was for the purifying of sin. The only way for sin to be purified is God's way. Many have tried their own way, their own formula, but it never works because it cannot solve the whole problem of sin. Even if a man did not sin, he was still not sinless because of human nature, and the act of not sinning can only help others if that person also conquered death as well as sin. It had to be done in a certain way where God was not only honoured and glorified but also His standards of righteous condemnation were upheld.

It is significant that immediately after the record of the Red Heifer that the power of a dead body is emphasised. It was the defilement of a dead body that was the issue that needed to be cleansed using the water of separation, not actual transgressions. This reinforces the Bible's teaching of sin in our flesh, which defiles. It defiles because it is unclean. It is unclean, not just because God says it is unclean, but because it contains the propensity to sin, the lusts of the old man within.

A dead body defiles, for this reason we have put in our Confession of Faith that apostates cannot baptise into Christ as they defile the candidate by their association with death. See doctrines to be rejected no 40. This idea of death itself being defiling is often overlooked when people assess the implications within this modern era of so many claiming life in Christ, whereas most are actually nothing more than bodies which are dead because they contain death within themselves absent from the purity of Christ.