

1. Just when one might think this book is strange enough as it is, we now get a chapter that can be summed up as follows: "Take a pure red cow, burn it up completely and then mix the ashes of that cow with clean water, and that mixture will make all of the Israelites ceremonially clean".
 - a) Know that this chapter is considered such a mystery to religious Jews, that many just say one has to accept it on faith and not try to understand it. King Solomon, who lived about a 1,000 years after this event and is recorded in the bible as the wisest of the kings is said (by Jewish tradition) to not understand why this ritual was necessary.
 - b) Even before we begin to try to understand ourselves why this event is here, it is time to recall a rule I learned many years ago about bible study: When one is confused about what a passage means, try putting Jesus in the middle of that passage and see if makes sense. While comparing Jesus to a red cow may seem like a big stretch of the imagination, it does work in many ways, and I'll discuss why that is so as we go through the lesson.
 - c) With those comments stated, let me now give my title, "Understanding the necessity of the sacrificial red cow". If nothing else comes from this study, hopefully one will learn why there is a whole chapter dedicated to becoming ritually clean by this process.
 - i) For what it is worth I spent some time this past few days getting an education on how "pure red cows" are breed, and some of the history behind this ritual. I do not want to teach on how to breed these cows, but I do want us to learn why this ritual and this chapter are in the bible.
 - ii) In the recorded history of Israel as a nation (both ancient and modern) there has not been many cows like this that have past the inspection of being "pure" red cows. The Jewish commentaries I read said there have been between six and nine such cows in their history. They did not need a lot of these cows as only a few ashes have to be mixed with water in order to perform this ritual.
 - d) At this point, let me explain the "cow chapter" in relevance to the book of Numbers.
 - i) If you recall from the last lesson, it was mostly about the Israelites accepting that the tribe of Levites were called to be the priests and how all of Israel was required to accept that fact, along with one family of Levites (Aaron and his sons) being in charge of offering sacrifices to God.
 - ii) The question for the rest of those Israelites is now, "How do the rest of us become ritually clean if only the priests can approach God?" If any of the other Israelites desire to draw close to God and are impure due to sin, how do they get pure? Yes they could have the Levites sacrifice an animal on their behalf, but that can be an expensive cost for a poor family. The point is another ritual was needed so that any Israelite can be pure in God's eyes. That is the necessity of this "cow" ritual.
 - iii) You may recall from a few chapters back, God told all of the Israelites that they were going to die out in the wilderness and only their children would enter the Promised Land. The point for them is that they knew roughly two million people would die over the next 40 years. That means this large group of people is going to have to deal a lot with death. There are going to be a lot of dead bodies that have to be moved and physically buried. Everyone in this group is going to have to deal with dead bodies at some point in the near future.
 - a) OK so what? The "so what" is, besides having to deal with death, is that for a Jewish person "Death is the opposite of life". This is not necessarily about diseases from a dead body. This is about the biblical concept that sin left alone leads to death. (See Romans 6:16.) Our morality reminds us that we are sinful by nature and sin has to be dealt with.

2. OK John, it's time for all of us to say to you, "What does any of this have to do with our lives?"
- a) So the ancient Jews had a ritual of slaughtering a red cow and mixing it with water in order for them to be ritually clean. Good for them, I suppose. However, since we are believing Christian (an assumption I make about my reader), we are "clean" by believing that Jesus is both God and that He died for our sins. The point being is what does the ashes of a red cow have to do with my life today? Why should I care about this stuff?
 - i) If King Solomon couldn't figure out why this chapter was here, what makes you any wiser than the man declared to be the wisest in the Old Testament? Isn't that a bit arrogant to claim you are wiser than He was?
 - ii) The answer is I don't claim to be wiser. I just claim to know that Jesus made the statement "that something greater than Solomon is here" (Based on Luke 11:31.) The point being is that Jesus claimed to be something greater than Solomon. That is why I do believe that statement. I trust in His (Jesus) wisdom as well as the fact I am trusting in the fact that He did die for my sins.
 - b) Remember that Jesus claimed that Moses, who was the author of Numbers was a prophet. See John 3:14 an example of Jesus quoting from this book.
 - i) If Jesus claimed that Moses wrote this book and in effect claimed this book is God ordained, then there should a purpose for us to study it, including this section.
 - ii) Yes there are "parallelism's" (a fancy way of saying there is some ways that the death and resurrection of Jesus is similar to the rituals of this chapter). However, the Old Testament is full of such parallelisms and that is not the central reason to study this chapter.
 - iii) The reason we should study this chapter is that it teaches us about how to be clean before God the Father. Yes we are clean by trusting in Jesus sacrifice, but there is more to it than that. In other words, how do know that sacrifice was sufficient for all of our sins, past present and future, even the one's we don't confess?
 - iv) To put it another way, if one cares about one's eternal relationship with God, why should I care about this chapter? Why should I care about the ashes of a red cow and how is that relevant to my life today? The answer is the red color. This is the only place I know of in the bible where the color of the animal is specified that is to be sacrificed. To state the obvious, red is the color of blood. There were no other animals common to that region that was that pure in red to symbolize the fact that "redness" had to mixed with pure water in order to be clean enough for us to be able to approach God the Father. Obviously that fact alone ties to Jesus' sacrifice.
 - v) This leads me back to my question of why should we care? Let's assume that we already believe that Jesus died for our sins, and we can now start to see some of the parallel ideas if "redness" being necessary to be pure before God? If we do get that, why should we study this ritual about sacrificing a pure red cow in order for us to be clean of our sins? To state the obvious again, Jesus was not a cow.
 - vi) What I want us to see is what Solomon missed: It is not the cow that significant, but the redness of the color. Just as Jesus blood was shed for the necessity for us Christians to be eternally forgiven, so must "redness" be part of the ritual in for these Israelites to be clean before God the Father, especially when they are going to have to be dealing with death on a regular basis. Even those Israelites got the idea that death is associated with eternity and if one wants to be eternally saved, then one is going to need "redness" as part of their cleansing ritual in order to be eternally accepted by God the Father.
 - c) All of that leads us back to this chapter. As we study about this sacrifice and this ritual, the key is to understand the necessity of the "redness" as necessity for eternal salvation. It is about understanding why Jesus was killed the way He was and why that shed blood was necessity for our eternal salvation. With that said, let us actually start this chapter.

3. Chapter 19, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ² "This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke.
 - a) The first thing to note here is that God somehow spoke this message to both Moses and Aaron. It was important enough to God that both of them get it. I don't know how He made it obvious to both to do this ritual. I hold the view if "God is God", then He does and will find a way to communicate that message to whom He wants to say it to.
 - i) In the next verse, we discover that God ordains Aaron's oldest son to actual perform this ritual. So if God wanted Eleazar to personally observe ritual, why didn't God just speak to him directly? Why speak to Moses and Aaron? I believe the answer is God wanted all the Israelites to understand the significance behind this ritual and these two men were the civil and religious leaders of the group.
 - b) Meanwhile, back to a discussion of cows. The actual requirement given to these two men were for all of the Israelites to present to them a red heifer with no defect, nor yoke.
 - i) For those of us with no agricultural experience, let me explain some of these terms.
 - a) First, a heifer refers to a cow that has never been impregnated. Such a cow can not produce any milk at that point in it's life. The Israelites traveled in the wilderness with a lot of animals and they would understand that fact.
 - b) Next it must be red. If one googles images of red cows, one can see that the color of these animals is similar to the color of blood.
 - c) The next issue is a "pure" red heifer. The Israelite priests determined such a cow to pass this test if no more than two non-red hairs were found on this animal. Now you know why there have been so few of them found in the history of the Israelite nation. This leads to no "defect or blemish". In other words it must be pure red in color and have no defects in nature.
 - d) Finally, it must be an animal that has never been harnessed for use. When one thinks of putting a harness on an animal, it is then trained for service.
 - e) The point is, besides being pure in color, and without defect, it must be only for God's use and not one that has been used for other purposes.
 - ii) So if only a few of these cows are "so pure" for use in their history, how have the Israelites all been cleaned for so many years with so few cows? The answer is they only need a few of the cow ashes to be mixed with water for purification.
 - a) Among the modern very conservative Jewish believers, some believe a new perfect red cow has to be found in order for religious Jews to be allowed to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Others amongst them argue that one has to find the remaining ashes of the last red cow and some argue that those ashes were hidden away before the last temple was destroyed.
 - b) While you and I can probably care less about this "pure red cow", this issue has been debated among Jewish religious scholars for thousands of years.
 - c) Now that we know all of that about this animal, it is time to describe the sacrifice itself.
4. Verse 3: Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. ⁴ Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting.
 - a) Once the cow is found, it is to be led outside the camp of the Israelites and then it is to be slaughtered in the presence of the son of the High Priest. That son, named Eleazar is then to take some of it's blood on his finger, and then sprinkle it seven times toward the only entrance to the "Tent" (tabernacle) that represents where God was located.
 - b) One has to admit, all of this seems like a strange, occultist type of ritual that serves no significant purpose. That is why this section stumps some Jewish scholars. I will argue that in order to understand why all of this "mumbo jumbo" was necessary, (I loved saying that term), one has to understand it in light of the New Testament. Let me explain:

- i) Hebrews 13:12 reminds us that Jesus was crucified outside of the city of Jerusalem. The High Priest at that time in effect, "watched and approved of this ritual", but didn't get his hands dirty by the process. When Jesus was crucified, the religious leaders did condemn Jesus to death, but they had Roman soldiers do the actual killing and didn't in effect "get dirty" like Eleazar in the process.
 - ii) However they did in effect, "Get blood on their hands" by turning Jesus over to the Romans. Jesus says they those priests are guilty of the greater sin by that action. (See John 19:11 on that point.)
 - a) My point is simply to see the parallelisms of how a red cow was sacrificed outside of the camp is similar to the way Jesus was sacrificed for us.
 - b) Therefore, this ritual in its own way acts out prophecy about Jesus.
 - c) Getting back to Eleazar, someone else slaughtered this animal. Then he was to take some of the blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the tabernacle entrance.
 - i) The idea is to associate the blood of this sacrifice with the presence of God. That is why the cow's blood was sprinkled toward the tabernacle.
 - ii) Personally, I suspect he walked a bit toward the tabernacle so the Israelites could observe this whole ritual as it happened. The truth is no one knows for sure, and thousands of years later, we don't know how it was specifically performed.
 - d) This leaves two more questions: First, why complete this ritual with his finger? I think it is just to show that the blood is associated with cleansing of our flesh. Since Eleazar was being trained to be the next high priest, he must learn that our flesh (that, is our human nature) is cleansed by the shedding of blood and not just looking toward God the Father for forgiveness.
 - e) The second question to ponder is why do this seven times? In the bible, when one sees the number seven, it is associated with completeness. For example, God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. The idea is that one can rest on the seventh day as one's work is completed. Any Jewish person with even a basic understanding of the bible would get this concept.
 - f) Tying it all together, one can see that the redness of the skin of the animal as well as the redness of the blood is associated with the complete cleansing of our sins. Jewish people then and now understand that in order to be ritualistically clean in God's eyes, somehow involved shed blood. What they fail too see is how this is a model of how God Himself will shed His own blood for the sake of our sins.
 - g) Meanwhile, it is time for us to get back to the barbeque pit and offer up a red cow.
5. Verse 5: While he watches, the heifer is to be burned--its hide, flesh, blood and offal.
- a) John's very loose translation: While the priest stands there, every aspect of the animal is to be burned up. That includes the skin, the meat the inside parts, even the dung and the blood of that animal. Here are some key distinct points about this sacrifice.
 - i) No other ordained sacrifice requires the blood to be burned up. For all of the other sacrifices ordained in the Old Testament, the blood must be drained out, as well as the removal of the fat portions and to be more disgusting, the dung has to be taken out of inside the cow.
 - ii) Yet here is this animal, burned as a whole, blood and all. That is why one such a cow can be used for many generations. All they needed was the ashes to be mixed with water for this cleansing. Therefore, a sacrifice of a pure red cow can be used for many generations as long as a small portion of which is mixed with water.
 - b) So if the blood is so sacred, why is it burned up with the animal here? It is to show how the blood was sacrificed on our behalf. Just as Jesus was crucified alive as a sacrifice on our behalf, one can see the similarity as this is the only Old Testament sacrifice that was burned as a whole, other than a little bit of blood put on the priests' finger.
 - i) Hang in there folks. It is about to get even stranger than it is so far.

6. Verse 6: The priest is to take some cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool and throw them onto the burning heifer.
- a) If burning up a whole cow is not weird enough as a cleansing ritual, mixed in with this fire is cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool. I would say that requires an explanation:
 - i) Cedar wood has a red tint to it, so the color is also represented. Many bible scholars argue that cedar was the type of wood used for the Cross, but no one knows for sure, so that is speculation. Most likely, it was just another naturally red product that shows the redness that represents the sacrifice for sin.
 - ii) Let me jump to "scarlet wool" next. For those who don't know, scarlet color is a variation of the color red. To put it another way, take some lamb wool, dye it so that has a red tint color then add it to the sacrifice for "more redness".
 - iii) Hyssop is essentially a weed that was common in the wilderness. It is green when it is alive and has a purplish flower. OK John, that is not red. Why is that there? When Jesus was on the cross, someone tried to give Jesus a drink by putting it on a sponge and giving it to Jesus via a hyssop branch. (See John 19:29). Most likely that sponge was made of wool.
 - a) Now think of the cross, being "red" from Jesus blood, along with a sponge being red from the blood and the hyssop branch being offered to Jesus.
 - b) My point being is the only natural products associated with the death of Jesus on the cross are here mixed in with the cow sacrifice.
 - iv) Could that be a coincidence? Of course it could. However, I come back to the concept that when a passage of the bible doesn't make sense, it is best to try to put Jesus "in the middle of that passage" and see how well it ties to Him.
 - b) In the meantime, we have these ingredients being burnt up along with the red cow and all the Israelites knew was that somehow, the ashes of this fire mixed with water (coming up) will make them ritually cleaned to approach God.
 - i) My point being that if someone told you that all it took to be acceptable with God was to sprinkle some water with these ashes on you, most people would think, "Well what is the harm?" and do it. The same with accepting Jesus as payment for one's sins. If one is simply willing to accept He is God and His payment is all one needs for salvation, then one should do that. The reason people refuse to accept His payment is in effect the same reason they won't apply this cow's blood: it comes down to pride. People want to show how worthy they are to God and won't accept His terms in order to come into His presence.
 - ii) Speaking of mixing this concoction with water, it is time to talk about water:
7. Verse 7: After that, the priest must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water. He may then come into the camp, but he will be ceremonially unclean till evening.⁸ The man who burns it must also wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he too will be unclean till evening.
- a) The essential point of these two verses is that the two men involved in this ritual of taking the cow and burning it up with the other ingredients must now bath. Remember that the only thing the priest did was take a little blood and sprinkle it toward the tabernacle. There was another man who did the "dirty work" of putting the red cow on the altar and adding the other ingredients to the fire. What is not stated, but is assumed, is that this second man also is in charge of gathering all the ashes from this fire.
 - b) The question here is essentially, "If this ritual is suppose to make us ceremonially clean, why is it the two men must now wash all of their clothes and bathe?" Even after all of that cleansing, they will still be unclean until evening. Remember that for a Jewish person, a new day begins at sundown. Therefore, to be ritualistic unclean until evening just means that one is unclean until the next day. So if this ritual is supposed to make us clean before God, why are they unclean? The idea is that sin is never to be taken lightly. Even all of this washing after dealing with sin is too be taken seriously.

- c) So does this mean God wants us to bathe after we have confessed a sin? In effect, yes. I don't mean an actual bath unless one needs one. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 15, Jesus says we are already clean because of His word (Verse 3). Think of that statement as the concept that we are saved because we trust that He is God and did pay the price for our sins. However, even with that stated, we still need to wash. Jesus stated on the same day (Chapter 13) that one still needs to wash one's feet as they get dirty. The Israelites wore sandals and not covered shoes.
 - i) The idea is that even if we are saved, we still have to deal with sin. Coming back to the Israelites, this cow was sacrificed for their sins. Even the two men who did this ritual understood that they were still sinful by nature and needing washing.
 - ii) The point for you and me is that even though we are made pure by Jesus sacrifice, we still have our sinful nature within us and sin must be confessed.
 - iii) So if we are saved, why do we still have the desire to sin? The short answer is God allows that temptation to be a part of our lives to keep us close to Him. It is only by drawing upon His power than we can have the power to overcome whatever sin we are struggling with at the moment.
 - iv) Let us also remember what confession is. It is simply stating or thinking God's way of doing things is right, and what I just did was wrong. Therefore, through His power, I want to turn from that act and trust in His power to do so. It does not mean we will never sin again. It just means we rely upon His power to be able to overcome sin and not our own will power.
- d) OK John, nice little speech. What does it have to do with a red cow sacrifice and these two men bathing? Glad you asked.
 - i) The point is this animal is going to be used to cleanse the Israelites of their sins. It does not represent God forgiving them, but just the idea that the Israelites realize the temptation to sin is always there. If they can't afford an animal to be given to the priests for their sins, they could wash with the ashes of this animal. It was a way for the average Israelite to trust that God has forgiven them.
 - ii) The ritual bathing by these two men were a public demonstration that God was dealing with sin and one has to be "bathed" of the whole process of touching sin.
- e) Last question here: If this ritual can cleanse the average Israelite back then and make them right with God, why was Jesus sacrifice necessary?
 - i) For starters, this sacrifice does point to what Jesus did on the cross.
 - ii) Second, the Israelites have been without this cow for about 2,000 years now.
 - iii) Third, even if a new cow is found or the ashes of an old one, how does a person then face God with this question: Is My Son's death not good enough for You? The point being is I'd rather trust in the perfect sacrifice of a perfect God than trust in a ritual of a slaughtered cow. This slaughtering does point to Jesus, and I am convinced of that fact.
 - iv) I am reminded of a story I heard a few months back and shared at that time too. There was a person who wrote a fictional book and fell in love with the main character of that book. The author then put himself (or herself, I can't remember) in the story in order for the author to marry that character. That in effect is the story of Jesus becoming a man. He put Himself in what He created out of love for the man and woman that He created in the first place.
 - v) My point being that Jesus dealt with sin Himself so we don't have to deal with the pain that it causes. At the same time, we look to Him to guide us through life to help us avoid sinful issues that come into our lives. That is what is being shown here in this chapter by the washing of the two men after the animal was sacrificed.
 - vi) Meanwhile, we are only half way through our story. Time to continue.

8. Verse 9: "A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin."¹⁰ The man who gathers up the ashes of the heifer must also wash his clothes, and he too will be unclean till evening. This will be a lasting ordinance both for the Israelites and for the aliens living among them.
- a) One unnamed person gathers up the ashes, keeps them outside the Israelite camp and this person must bathe after this chore. Notice the big emphasis on washing after this ritual. The person must wash his clothes and bath himself after this process.
 - i) What God is trying to teach us from this ritual is that this process has in effect become "holy", that is separated for His use. Since we as humans are not perfect creatures, we must wash in order to be clean from sin.
 - ii) This leads me back to Jesus' lecture on washing feet. I taught earlier in this lesson how Jesus said in effect, "we are clean" by His words, but we still need to wash our feet. Remember again at that time, that Israelites wore sandals and they would have dirty feet by the end of the day. It was Jesus' way of making the point that we are ritually clean by our trust in Him. However, our contact with the world still contaminates us. The way we Christians clean ourselves is to spend regular time in prayer and His word and in summary, refocus upon Him.
 - b) So are you saying these ancient Israelites are to trust in this dead cow ritual and not pray? Of course not. However, they needed a visual sign to show that they are eternally clean before God. In effect until Jesus can be a similar type of sacrifice by offering His blood for our sins, which we "wash in" by our trust in our belief in that eternal sacrifice.
 - c) At this time, I would like to share a fairly famous bit of history from the Middle Ages.
 - i) Between 1348 and 1350, there was a horrible plague that spread from China to Europe. It is estimated that 350 to 450 million people died at that time. Without getting into a lot of medical details, one thing that was not known at that time was about the importance of washing regularly to avoid germs. What is interesting is that a lot of Jewish communities were for the most part spared of this plague.
 - a) What people now realize is that their ritual washing to avoid death had a lot to do with being spared this plague.
 - ii) My point as it ties to this lesson is God "knew" that being washed with water can spare us from disease a whole lot longer than before the world figured it out. Did these Jewish people have the cow's ashes mixed with the water? I don't know. I just know that God taught them that washing makes them clean and we now know they were for the most part spared of that great plague of that time.
 - iii) The spiritual lesson is about how to avoid eternal death. While washing will keep us from bad germs and the avoidance of sin will keep us "clean before God", this strange ritual of everybody washing to avoid death saved that community from the horrible plague that happened at that time. This shows that there are practical benefits as well as spiritual benefits of this ritual.
 - d) Meanwhile, going way back to roughly a fifteen hundred years before Christ, we have the Israelites being taught here that washing in water mixed with this concoction of ashes will make them ceremonial clean before God. It will help them when they have to physically deal with dead bodies. But John, didn't that whole generation die during this forty-year period? Yes they did. God is giving them a way to practically deal with death. That helps disease not to spread as well as giving the Israelites a way to feel clean before God after having to deal with dead bodies.
 - i) Think of it this way, that washing ritual may have saved the next generation of Israelites from contracting diseases so they could live out healthy lives.
 - ii) My key point here is this whole ritual had practical benefits that protected them in the wilderness as well as made them feel clean after touching dead bodies.

9. Verse 11: "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days.¹² He must purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third and seventh days, he will not be clean."¹³ Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the LORD's tabernacle. That person must be cut off from Israel. Because the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean; his uncleanness remains on him.
- a) Now comes the description of how the Israelites actually purify themselves. The issue begins with the question of what do I do if I touch a dead body? Remember that they were out in the wilderness and they had to manually move dead bodies. Given the fact that this whole generation was to die out over the next forty years, contact with a dead body was going to be a common problem to deal with.
 - b) Therefore, the text addresses the issue of how do I clean myself after I have contact with a dead body? Whoever made such physical contact would be "unclean" for seven days.
 - i) Practically speaking, it means the person who made that contact has to move to outside the camp of the Israelites and separate themselves for seven days.
 - ii) During that time frame, they need to wash on the third day and on the seventh day. It says they have to wash with water, and I assume that means the water has to be mixed with some of these ashes from the sacred cow.
 - iii) Despite the strange "mumbo jumbo" of this ritual, it did help the Israelites feel clean after touching a dead body. Again, during the time of the Middle Ages, this ritual has spared a large percentage of those Israelites from having to deal with a plague that killed off a good sized percentage of Europe, Asia and even affected parts of North Africa.
 - a) If one gets nothing else out of this lesson, learn about the importance of washing in order to avoid germs from spreading.
 - c) With that said, let me get back to the text. It says one has to wash on the third day and again on the seventh day. So if one is physically dirty from touching that body, why wait until the third day? Also, if this ritual makes one clean, why does one have to do it twice and wash again on the seventh day?
 - i) Let me start with the practical reason and then I'll move on to the spiritual reason. Given the fact that there was going to be a lot of death around, it may take up to three days to get some of this water mixed with the cow ashes to that individual and therefore, they had three days to get their hands on that water.
 - a) For an Israelite, a seventh day represents the day of God's resting from all of His work. It represents a complete period of time and therefore, they understand that washing again on the seventh day was a sign of being completely clean before God. Therefore it was now safe for them to go live amongst the other Israelites now that a complete period of time (a week) has past since they touched the dead body.
 - ii) Are you saying that just as Jesus rose again on the third day, that idea ties to this ritual of washing on the third day? Yes. Throughout the bible, there is a common pattern of things happening on the third day. Once one realizes that, one can see a third reference throughout the Old Testament. In effect each of those references are pointing toward the fact that for all Christians "new life" begins with the day that Jesus rose from the dead.
 - a) Just as the Christian began their new life on that "Easter Sunday" (for the lack of a better term), so these Israelites began their new clean life with the first washing on the third day after making contact with a dead body.
 - b) The Israelites then washed again on the seventh day after contact with a dead body to indicate a complete period of time has elapsed since this has occurred and they can now live amongst their families again.

- d) With that speech safely out of my system, let me now return to the text. Notice that Verse 13 says that anyone who fails to perform this ritual "defiles the LORD's tabernacle".
 - i) In other words, those who fail to perform this ritual may contract diseases, but that is not the spiritual reason. Failure to cleanse oneself this way defies God's desire for their lives. To say it another way, God wanted all the Israelites to be clean as they seek Him. To put it in Christian vocabulary, God wants us to make as much of an effort as possible to avoid sin in our life.
 - ii) This ties back to the fact that Jesus told Peter that the regular washing of our feet is a necessary process. Jesus wasn't talking about literal bathing, but using that idea as an illustration. The point being is that even though we are forgiven of all of our sins, past present and future, we still need to avoid contact with things that lead us into temptation and avoid sin as much as possible.
 - a) To quote a former pastor of mine, "I don't need your help to tell me how to avoid sin, I can find it all by myself". We as people have to deal with sinful issues as long as we are living in this world. We have to "spiritually wash" to avoid sin by confessing it when it occurs and sticking close to God by prayer and by time in His word.
 - b) Just as the Israelites had to make themselves spiritually clean by this ritual, so we as completely forgiven Christians still have to cleanse ourselves of our sins by confessing them when they occur. Therefore, even though we don't wash with red cow ashes, this act does symbolize how we are made clean by Jesus' blood mixed in our hearts with regular washing, which just means we seek His forgiveness when we do sin.
 - iii) Coming back to the text, the point is God is teaching them that contact with dead does defy our relationship with Him. It is not in that death can be avoided, but that eternal death can be avoided by our trust in Him. This ritual of washing is symbolizing that being clean required the red ashes mixed with water.
 - e) One last thing about these verses and then I can move on. The last verse teaches that if one fails to keep this ritual, that person is to be "cut off" from the camp. The word that is translated "cut off" can mean excommunicated and it can also mean executed. Either way, the guilty person is banished from their society.
 - i) Think of this in terms of someone in our Christian circle who commits a sin and then refuses to repent of that sin. Yes the person bears the guilt of that sin. It is also the duty of the rest of the church to say in effect, "you can't be amongst us until you confess and turn from that sin". I'm not saying Christians have to walk around being the sin police. I am saying that if someone is well known for being guilty of a particular sin, Jesus taught in Luke Chapter 17 that the person must be confronted individually, then as a group to say in effect, "You are not welcome here until one turns from that particular sin."
10. Verse 14: "This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days,¹⁵ and every open container without a lid fastened on it will be unclean.
- a) Verse 14 says in effect, "I don't care if you are Jewish or not. If anyone out there in the wilderness enters a tent with a dead person in it, will be unclean for seven days". That means if one enters the tent of that dead body, one must perform the "cow ritual".
 - i) Does this mean I am to avoid the room of a dead person today? No, as modern ability to deal with dead people is different. The symbolic idea is that God wants us to associate death with being the opposite of Him. In other words, we need the life of Jesus' blood to clean us of any and all dealing with sin and death. That is why sin must be confessed and turned from whenever we encounter any such issue in our own life. That is the seven-day ritual that we must perform.

- b) I have to admit, Verse 15, in a strange way is my favorite verse in this chapter. Instead of just talking about this cow ritual and cleansing from sin, we get an idea that would be logical to us about destroying any open container without a lid, because it is unclean.
 - i) Think of it this way: Flies and bugs are attracted to dead bodies. By saying that any open container in the same room is unclean, God is teaching the Israelites how germs are spread through flies, bugs and even mice and rats that way.
 - ii) Coming back the Middle Ages, that practice of destroying open jars when they are in the same room as a dead person helped religious Jews survive the black plague of the 16th Century. It protected them from diseases that were spread by contact with insects and rats.
 - iii) If nothing else, this verse is a reminder that God cares about how we live as well as our eternal salvation. If that is true, why did God allow all of those millions of people to die in the middle ages? The answer is it taught us about the importance of washing in order to avoid such diseases. It taught us about germs. It taught us about how trusting in the blood of Christ and washing in Him gives us life.
 - a) If this life is all that there is, God is very unfair. However, if there is eternal life, than God can allow horrible things like this to teach us to trust in Him.
- 11. Verse 16: "Anyone out in the open who touches someone who has been killed with a sword or someone who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days.
 - a) If you recall, the last set of verses say in effect that if we walk into a tent of someone who has died, we are unclean for seven days. Given the fact this whole generation of Israelites were to die out there, I suspect that the discovery of a dead body in ones family tent was the most common way the Israelites would have discovered who would be alive or dead on any given day.
 - b) The question for them is now what if someone dies another way? What if someone is killed in a battle or just dies naturally out in the open, how do we deal with that type of death? God's answer is in effect "the same way". The text is teaching us that death is death and it does not matter how someone dies, it has to be cleansed the same way.
 - c) What God is also teaching us is in effect "sin is sin". It does not matter how we came in contact with that sin, we have to deal with it. Just as the Israelites back then had to cleans themselves with the cow ashes and water, so we have to clean ourselves with the blood of Jesus. Practically speaking it just means we have to think about God, turn from that sinful issue and realize what we did was wrong and turn from it. Even if our contact with a sinful issue was accidental, it still has to be dealt with.
 - d) Coming back to the Israelites, they understood that they were unclean from any sort of contact with a dead body. They needed a ritual in order for them to understand that not only were they still saved, but that they could be made clean again before God.
 - i) Think of it this way: Nothing reminds us more about our own mortality then to be around something or someone that is dead. Those Israelites became unclean as they realized their own mortality by seeing death. Having a ritual in order for one to be "clean again" reminds themselves that this life is not all that there is and they can be right with God by performing this seven day ritual and focusing on Him.
- 12. Verse 17: "For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them.
 - a) From Verses 17 through 20, we are going to get into some specifics about how this ritual is to actually be performed. The point here in Verse 17 is simply that some ashes from the red cow are mixed with fresh water and poured on the person who made contact with the dead body. One can see how that alone would help a person to feel clean again after just coming into contact with a dead body.

13. Verse 18: Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death.¹⁹ The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean.
- a) Back in the early verses of this chapter, I talked about hyssop. That was a weed that grew out in that wilderness area. Some hyssop was burned in the fire, along with the cow.
 - b) Here a command is given to use hyssop to sprinkle water on whoever would come in contact with a dead body. Since that weed was common in that region as well as in Israel, the point is it was readily available when the ritual needed to be performed.
 - i) Believe it or not, this leads me into a quick discussion about baptism. As most of us are aware, a long-term debate within the Christian church is whether or not a person should be fully dunked in water or just sprinkled with water. I am not here to resolve that classical debate. I just want to say that the ritual of sprinkling water on people is based in part on this chapter and these verses.
 - ii) In other words, as people were made "clean before God" by sprinkling clean water with the ashes of the red cow on people, so many Christian churches adapted the ritual of sprinkling clean water on people as a form of a baptism ritual.
 - iii) So do I think this ritual is correct or do I believe in full baptism? No matter how I answer, I am sure I will get in trouble with some of my readers. Therefore, let me just say that I don't think the style of the ritual is nearly as important as the idea that the receiver of a baptism then decides to commit their lives to pleasing God.
 - c) These verses also give a few words about the person giving the "sprinkling". That person too, must be ritually clean. Practically speaking, it just meant they could not have any physical contact with dead bodies themselves and they must confess any sins that they are personally aware of before performing this ritual.
 - i) Time for another interesting side-note. Religious Jewish priests (rabbi's) do not go to the burials site today. When a Jewish funeral is performed, the rabbi still does do the funeral, but does not go the gravesite. That is the modern interpretation of the concept that the rabbi is to be associated with life and not death.
 - ii) I don't know what you do with that information, but now you know.
 - d) Meanwhile, back to the sprinkling ritual: The person receiving the sprinkling of water mixed with the cow's ashes must wash on the third day and on the seventh day after receiving this sprinkling. But John, didn't you say earlier that a reason to wait until the third day was that they didn't have the water available? Remember that one needs enough water to bathe which may be different than a small jar full of water needed to sprinkle this water upon someone. No matter what the availability of water, the person who received this sprinkling must wash on the third day and the seventh day.
 - i) Until that time period is done, this person must now camp away from the other two million Israelites. Think of it this way: It may take three days for that person to pack up and resettle a few miles away, so the third day was a practical request.
 - ii) For that person to feel clean again, the third day washing as well as the seventh day washing would then make the person clean in God's eyes and then and only then was the person allowed to live amongst the other Israelites again.
 - e) John, you have to admit all of this is pretty weird. Why should I care about all of this stuff when I have enough problems to deal with? First it is to understand that God cares about our daily relationship with Him. Yes we are permanently clean by trusting in Jesus' complete payment for our sins. Still, we must also "wash regularly" to keep us from sin. That does not mean we have to apply this sprinkling ourselves. It just means we need to stick close to God to deal with our sins and temptations leading to sin.

14. Verse 20: But if a person who is unclean does not purify himself, he must be cut off from the community, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, and he is unclean. ²¹ This is a lasting ordinance for them.
 - a) The chapter is ending with a comment on the penalty for disobedience.
 - i) Practically speaking, when one ignores this ritual, one is now dealing not only with a dead corpse, but most likely with the spread of disease.
 - ii) Let's say someone just buries the dead body and then says, "I'm too angry about this death and I don't want to go through the water sprinkling ritual". Such a person is now focusing on death and not "life". Yes we can grieve for the person that we miss and that is a separate topic. The point is God wants us to remember that He is still there despite the pain of death and that is why He wanted them to perform this ritual after such a person has to deal with death.
 - b) For God to encourage this ritual, the penalty was at the least to be excommunicated from the Israelites and possibly be executed. The point is there is a big penalty being placed on not performing this ritual.
 - i) As a modern application, many religious Jews won't go up on the Temple Mount today because they believe they have to be sprinkled with the same substance before they can approach that location. That is why they are working hard to try to produce either another pure red cow or find the buried ashes of the last one. We will see how history unfolds to see if this becomes relevant in the future.
15. Verse 21 (cont.): "The man who sprinkles the water of cleansing must also wash his clothes, and anyone who touches the water of cleansing will be unclean till evening.
 - a) The next point here is that the person administering the sprinkling must also wash his (or her) own clothing and be unclean until evening. The point is the person performing this ritual is also coming in contact (by association) with death and therefore, that person is considered unclean until the next day that begins at sundown. I suspect that practically, it just means they have to stay in their tent until sundown and wash.
 - b) The whole idea here is that God wants us to focus on life, which is the concept that all good things come from Him and not eternal death. Thus, all of these rituals.
16. Verse 22: Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening."
 - a) Imagine if one came in physical contact with a dead corpse. Now one cannot touch any thing until that evening. I was trying to picture that. Does that mean one has to sit or lie still and not touch anything? I suppose it does. The visual picture is about not spreading death to others, but practically speaking, it just means one has to lie still for a long time.
 - b) I could elaborate further, but after 12 pages of this stuff, you get the idea by now.
17. John, you have to admit, this is a "downer" of a chapter. It is all about dealing with death and performing this strange ritual of mixing red cow ashes with water in order to be clean from dealing with death. Remember that this was necessary because the Israelites were going to spend the next forty years dealing with death. Seeing all of those dead corpses will constantly remind them of their own mortality. Having a ritual like this will remind them of their eternal lives based on their trust in God.
 - a) For us, let me end the lesson this way: In 1st John 5:7-9, it says that these three are in agreement about our salvation in Jesus: The Spirit, the water and the blood. In effect, all three are applied to our lives when we trust in Jesus. Also in effect those three things are applied to those Israelites lives when they apply the cow's blood and water and God's presence upon their lives. That is why this "cow ritual" is in the bible.
18. Heavenly Father, may we never lose focus of the fact that we have applied Jesus' blood to our bodies that are mostly water. Further, we desire the Holy Spirit be upon us, so that we may live a life pleasing to You in all that we do. May those three concepts of water, blood and spirit guide our lives so we can make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen