

A Worship Study Guide for Individuals, Groups and Families: For the week of March 18, 2018

Note to Discussion Leaders: Have members read the Bible passage in the group meeting. This is a “worship discussion” guide, and our reflections and applications are grounded in Scripture. Read through this guide before meeting with the group. You do not need to work through the whole guide. Decide which points would be most helpful for the time of meeting together, and use them as a starting point for your time together.

Numbers 19:1-22 “True Cleanliness”

¹ 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.

- **Death was a constant for Israel in the wilderness. It is likely that the community averaged more than 75 funerals per day during the years of wandering. So, God established laws of purification. What type of animal is used to establish this purification (2)?**
- **Eleazar the priest took the animal outside the camp to have it slaughtered, unlike typical burnt offerings (3). What did he do with the animal (4-5)?**
- **Cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet yarn were added as the animal was consumed by fire. These same three materials were also used in the ritual of purification of skin disease ([Leviticus 14:1-9](#)). Although this sacrifice was intended to purify, people involved in the slaughter (7), burning (8) and collecting of ashes (10) were all made unclean until evening. What was done with the ashes of the animal (9)?**

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.

- **Becoming unclean by touching a dead body was likely a regular occurrence. How did the unclean person purify himself (11-12)?**
- **The penalty for not purifying oneself after becoming unclean by touching a dead body was stiff. What was that penalty (12-13)?**

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 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.

- **If a person were to die in his tent, what did his dead body make unclean? How was it made clean again (14-19)?**

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.”

- **What happened if an unclean person chose not to purify himself according to the Laws of Purification (20)?**
- **During the allotted time of uncleanness, what became of the objects that the unclean person touched (22)?**
- **Each week in worship after confessing our sins, we are assured of forgiveness through the reading of God’s Word. This week we read [1 John 1:7-9](#) as our *Words of Encouragement*. How does Jesus cleanse His people? What is required by us for cleansing?**
- **Each Sunday, we read a New Testament reading to complement the Numbers sermon text. This week, we read [Hebrews 9:11-14](#). What is the Christian’s understanding of the “ashes of a heifer”? What kind of purification does the sacrifice of Jesus provide?**
- **We sing in worship to praise God and corporately reflect on the Word of God. This week we sang *Before the Throne of God Above*, Charitie Lees Bancroft’s great hymn describing the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. Read the hymn in the [order of worship here](#) as a group. What aspects of the Priestly ministry of Jesus described encourage you? Why?**
- **Take time to pray together as a group. Read this week’s *Call to Worship* from [Psalm 116:5-9](#) as a prompt for this time of prayer.**

Sermon Notes

This week, Steve Shelby preached on [Numbers 19:1-22](#).

- A quick word about why is there so much emphasis on handling the dead in Numbers:
 - We experience death very differently than people did just 150 years ago.
 - There is a lot of dying going on in the camp.
 - The people of God are surrounded by all sorts of pagan and even evil rituals surrounding the dead.
 - Every time someone of them dies in the wilderness it is a reminder of their sin, as it is for us.
- The Red Heifer
 - Unblemished
 - The effects of the sacrifice are ongoing
 - Only ‘clean’ persons can administer the cleansing
 - The process of decontamination actually contaminates. The contaminated ones cannot worship until they are cleansed.
 - Unlike other sacrifices this one is done outside the camp.
 - Only the sacrifice of Jesus cleanses from a guilty conscience.
- What does this say about us?
 - Our identity
 - Our posture
 - Our message
 - Our hope
 - “When religious experts suggest an identity upgrade, the whole proposal amounts in my book, to nothing more than a grand slogan and a new coat of paint. We could try to re-envision ourselves as a community center or a social advocacy firm if we want to wrench ourselves trying to fit in someone else’s clothes. But look, we are the church. We are incompetent in a lot of our endeavors, but the Holy Spirit has gifted us to live into a simple and straightforward calling. Our whole story is predicated on the fact that we are big sinners. What is supposed to be unique about us is that we are the first to recognize this about ourselves. We see the trouble we are in and we cry out ‘Help me’. That is the area in which we lead.” (*Winn Collier*)
 - This is the message that compels us to love and live in our lives and communities even if it sometimes seems small and mundane.

Questions about this week’s study guide? Contact Kevin Greene, kevin@wepc.org
To hear sermons and access past study guides visit www.wepc.org/archivedsermons