

# The Christian Arsenal

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## NUMBERS 19:1-20:13

Chapter 19 in today's lesson tells us that God gave the priests a **purification process**. This process of purification used the ashes of a red heifer. This process was involved and we're not going into the details of it, but I want to point out a couple of things...

At this point in Israel's wilderness wanderings, dead bodies **were becoming a common sight**.

The wilderness deaths were the judgment of God upon a rebellious people. Whether these folks died from **plague**, or **fire from heaven** or **natural causes or the ground opened** up and swallowed them, the end result was the same...they died and the cause was the judgment of God upon their unbelief.

Well, the touching of a dead body brought defilement and the presence of more and more dead bodies demanded a way of cleansing for the younger generation that was coming on.

If we took the time to read this chapter, we'd see a process that was **very detailed, very exact** in how it was to be carried out...and also very strange to our ears. But, we need to remember that man did not dream up this process...**this red heifer purification process was given by Almighty God!**

People who became ceremonially defiled from touching a dead body could become clean again by using the ashes of the red heifer. They would have to wait three days after their defilement and then go out of the camp with a man who **was** clean to the place where the ashes were kept. The clean man would mix some of the ashes with running water in a vessel, dip hyssop into the water and sprinkle it on the unclean person. This would be repeated four days later. The cleansed person would then wash himself and his clothes and wait until evening to return to the camp.

I think it's interesting that the same method of purification was necessary for the defiled man as the undefiled man. The undefiled had to cleanse himself before he could come back into the camp because he had come in contact with the defiled man.

By the same token, we as believers have our sins forgiven the very same way unbelievers are forgiven. The blood that washed us clean when we were yet sinners is the same blood that keeps us clean. We both must come to the Lord Jesus Christ and confess our sins...don't we?

See, it was a very serious offense if a defiled person refused to be purified, because **defiled people defiled the camp**. It was so serious that unclean people who refused to be cleansed were cut off from the nation and stoned to death.

***By the way, when we were in Israel, we were shown some red heifers that are being bred for the purpose of following this ritual. Certain orthodox Jews believe that the time is coming when the sacrifices and ceremonial purifications will begin again...and they're doing all they can to be ready.***

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Now, these orthodox Jews wouldn't agree with our belief in the Rapture and the Tribulation and the Second Coming, because they believe their Messiah hasn't come the first time yet...but they do believe He is coming and they do believe at some point the Dome of the Rock will be destroyed, making room for the rebuilding of their Temple, and they believe it so strongly that they are raising red heifers. We were told that they inspect each red heifer for any hair that may not be red. If the animal has a gray or black hair...that animal doesn't meet the standards.

**All that was free, and just something for you to ponder...**

Getting back to the red heifer...please turn to **Hebrews 9:11-14**...and see what the writer of Hebrews says about this process today...

The church today doesn't worry about external ritual uncleanness, but we should take to heart the lesson of this chapter...that **God wants us to be a holy and undefiled people. God promises forgiveness and cleansing to His children if they turn from their sins and confess them to the Lord...**

An innocent animal had to die to provide ritual cleansing for the Jews, but the innocent Lamb of God had to die to provide cleansing for you and me!

As Chapter 20 begins, the wanderings are almost over. Almost 40 years have gone by. We know this because of where they are. They're back in the wilderness of Zin and if we were to look at **chapter 33**, where God gives us the itinerary of these folks, we would see that they were winding down their wilderness wanderings. While the people were at Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, waiting for instructions, Miriam died.

Chapter 20:1...

What a short obituary...Miriam died and was buried...

The death of Miriam must have affected Moses and Aaron deeply.

It was Miriam whom the Lord used to **save Moses' life** when he was a baby...

It was Miriam who **told Pharaoh's daughter** about one who could nurse Moses and of course, the one she talked about was Moses' own mother, Jochebed...

It was Miriam who had **led the praises** of the women at the Red Sea. And Miriam had endured the wilderness hardships alongside her brothers.

The only blemish on her record is **her criticism of Moses** that we saw a couple or three weeks ago...but there are very few servants of God who have unblemished records...

**Verses 2-5**...

Well, doesn't **this** sound familiar? Like a broken record?

This is the **seventh time** (but who's counting?) that these folks have murmured against Moses and Aaron...

As I thought about these people this week, I was really tempted to put them down as just **a bunch of whining, immature crybabies**...and you know what the Lord reminded me of?

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Do you remember the ice storm of 1994? Our power went off as did most of yours. All I could think of was **it's cold, and it's dark and how are we going to eat?**

Well, my dear husband looked at it as a real challenge! He would have made a wonderful pioneer. We went to the grocery store (in the dark), and picked up some steaks and some potatoes and we came home and Bill grilled the steaks outside and put the potatoes down in the coals and I made a salad and we ate by candlelight and we bunked down in front of the fireplace.

I wish I could tell you that I treated it as a big adventure as he did! But, I really didn't like it at all...I wanted to go check into a hotel!

I was so grateful our power didn't stay off long...I don't know how some people stood their 2 weeks or so of no power! (Well, that's just my testimony!)

James said, "Consider it all **joy** when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance and let that endurance have its perfect result...that you may be perfect..."

I've got a long way to go...God has a lot more work to do on me before I'm perfect...and that's scary, because it means that I've got a lot more testings to endure!!

Well, now that you've heard my confession, let's get back to the children of Israel...  
Every time these folks came to a hard place they thought of how "good" they had it back in Egypt, didn't they?

## Verse 6...

It was the **people** who should have been on their faces before God, but once again we see Moses and Aaron interceding...

Did you notice the **glory of the Lord** appeared? **verse 6b**

Each time the people rebelled and complained, God made His presence known, didn't He? You'd think these folks would learn, wouldn't you?

**And you'd think I would, too!!**

## Verses 7-8...

Turn to **Exodus 17:2-6...**

Some men teach that Moses' error in Numbers 20 was in smiting the rock twice...**but he shouldn't have struck the rock at all.** It had already been struck! Here in Numbers, Moses was told to speak to the rock!

## Verses 9-10...

Do you get the feeling Moses is just a little out of sorts with these folks? "...you rebels..." Don't miss "shall **we** bring forth..."

No, Moses, **we** aren't going to bring forth anything!! It is **God** who will bring forth the water!

## Verse 11...

**"Oh, Moses, now look what you've done!"**

We've said repeatedly that **there are types and pictures in the Old Testament.** Well, the rock was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ! We read in Exodus where God instructed the rock to be struck. And this was a type or picture of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

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***Jesus was crucified once...He was smitten once! He never needs to be crucified again! And, God didn't want this rock to be struck or smitten again...Why? Because it marred the picture...***

## **1 Corinthians 10:1-4...**

The Jews had a popular legend and it was still believed by many in the days of Paul. That legend stated that the actual rock that Moses struck followed the children of Israel throughout their wilderness wanderings and this rock provided water wherever they went.

The Apostle Paul may have been alluding to this legend when he said, **“Yes, a Rock did follow Israel in the wilderness.** But it wasn't a physical rock that provided merely physical water. It was a spiritual Rock, the Messiah (the Hebrew word for Christ) whom you have long awaited, and He was with our fathers even then.”

***That supernatural Rock protected and sustained God's people and would not allow them to perish. Old Testament believers did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but even during the exodus, they had the sustaining presence of the preexistent Messiah, the preincarnate Christ...caring and fulfilling the needs of His people.***

***Have you ever wondered why God was so hard on Moses and Aaron? After all, these men had spent the biggest part of their lives preparing to lead and leading these folks to the Promised Land, and now they aren't going to be allowed to enter...***

It's as though there was a portrait painted by the very hand of Almighty God and **Moses came along and took a rod and ruined it...he marred it.** See, God wanted Moses to **guard** and **protect** and **treat as holy** the type of Jesus...but in his frustration, Moses marred the type of Jesus that the rock represented. **God told Moses very clearly that he was to speak to the rock and that was all he was supposed to do.** We'll say a little more about this in just a few minutes...

By the way...the water **did** come out, didn't it?

***Verse 11b: "...it came out abundantly and the congregation and their beasts drank."***

This shows us the grace of God...**grace...undeserved, unmerited favor...**

**The children of Israel didn't deserve the water because of their murmuring...**

**Moses and Aaron didn't deserve the water because of their disobedience...**

You've heard the differences between **mercy** and **grace** and **justice**...I've given you this illustration before...

Stuart Briscoe tells this story of himself and his son. Mr. Briscoe's son had misbehaved and had to be punished, and the father asked the son what he thought his punishment should be. "How many licks should you get, son?"

The boy said, "Well, I guess I should get 10."

So, Briscoe gave his son 9 licks.

Mr. Briscoe sent his son to his room to think about what he had just done. The boy went to his room, relieved he'd gotten only 9 licks when he knew he really deserved 10, and thought he didn't understand it, he didn't believe that now was the time to ask any questions. A couple of hours later, his father came in and said, "Son, let's go get an ice cream cone."

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Well, the son couldn't help but question his father about all this. "I just don't understand...you gave me only 9 licks when I deserved 10, and now we're going for ice cream?" Mr. Briscoe said, "Son, I just couldn't pass up this opportunity to teach you an important lesson in theology...the 10 licks would have been a **picture of justice...your getting what you really did deserve**. The 9 licks were a **picture of mercy...your not getting what you really did deserve**, and the ice cream is a **picture of grace...your getting what you don't deserve**."

If God had given Moses and Aaron and the people **justice...He would have killed them right then**. But, in His **mercy**, **He withheld justice**, and in His **grace**, **He gave them water**.

Verses 12-13...

What can you and I learn from this passage of Scripture?

**1) That the best of folks have their failures, even in those areas of their character where they are strongest.**

Moses was called the most humble man on earth, but here we see him sinning **in the heat of passion...**

**"Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall..." 1 Cor. 10:12**

Many times Satan tempts us at our **points of weakness**, but many times Satan tempts at our **points of strength**. We become complacent...**assured that we won't fall when tempted in a certain area**.

**But be careful... "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall."**

Well, not only do we learn that the best of folks have their failures, but we also learn

**2) That God judges sin not as man judges concerning sin.**

See, we see what's on the outside...whether or not circumstances justify a certain action. I mean...we look at Moses' reaction to these whining folks and we say, "what's so bad about what he did?" But, we must remember:

a) God knew Moses' heart and He knew at that moment  
Moses' heart was not focused upon God, it was full of frustration  
and it was full of anger.

Beloved, God sees beneath the surface...He goes to the heart of the matter. And when God brings chastisement and discipline into our lives, it's because He loves us and wants us to learn obedience even if He has to teach us the hard way.

b) God could not put up with the picture of His precious  
Son being marred and going unnoticed for all the generations  
to come.

Just trust this...God's judgments are just...maybe not "fair" in man's eyes...but they are **divinely just and divinely righteous!!**

And, may I just say this before we leave this subject...

Just as the rock in the wilderness was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ in Moses' day, so are you and I a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ today. When folks look at us they ought to see

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Jesus. And, when we mar that picture by deliberate disobedience, God is grieved and He is displeased with us!

We've said before that the Promised Land was a type, not of heaven, but of the victorious Christian life. When Moses marred the picture of the Lord Jesus, he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land and when we, by deliberate sin, mar the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ that the world should see in us...we cannot enter into the victorious Christian life...until we repent and ask forgiveness...

**Beloved, Hebrews 6 tells us that if we crucify Jesus again, we put Him to open shame. Why? Because we say, in effect that Christ's work at Calvary was not sufficient!**

Not only do we see that the best of God's folks have their failures and that God's judgments are not man's, but we also see

**3) That God not only notices and is displeased with the sins of all His people but that the nearer we are to Him the more offensive our sins are to Him.**

I've said this before...and it's still true...the closer we get to God, the more we know His ways and His Word, the "pickier" He gets with us. I mean, the things you could once say or do, the **places** you once could go, the **people** you once could be with, the **books** you once could read, the **movies** you once could watch...well, **you can't** anymore, can you? "To whom much is given, much is required."

God holds us accountable for what we know. That's why I've said over and over that **it's a dangerous thing to get into His Word**. But, at the same time, we're commanded to get into it. So, we just have to know and understand that as He **teaches us** more and more and as He **expects** more and more, He also is **conforming us to the image of His Son** more and more. And when He is in the business of conforming us, He is chipping away all those old sins we used to take so for granted.

See, God isn't hoping we'll fail...He's hoping we'll succeed!!

Lastly...we learn from this passage

**4) That when our heart is hot within us we must hold our tongue.**

James said that our tongue is set on fire by hell. James also tells us that the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. The psalmist, speaking of this incident, says, "Moses spoke rashly with his lips."

How many times have you spoken words in anger and frustration you wish you hadn't? How many times have you done something in anger and frustration you wish you hadn't? How many hours have you stayed awake wishing you could unsay words spoken and undo things done in anger and frustration? AM I THE ONLY ONE???

***Well, I wonder how Moses must have felt as he sat down with his stylus in hand and wrote of this incident...***

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Do you think he felt shame and remorse and regret? I do, and I also believe he felt sorrow that he had grieved the heart of God.

I believe Moses' heart's desire above all else was that Jehovah would be glorified and I believe as hard as this experience was in his life...and as hard as the consequence that came because of it...I believe he would say it was all worth it if we, this day, would look at his failure and learn from it!!!...**and I hope we do!!**