

## SPRINKLING THE DOGS

### A Devotional Meditation from Chukat (Decree)

Numbers 19:1-22:1; Judges 11:1-33; Psalm 90:4; Isaiah 52:13-15; Ezekiel 36:22-28;  
Matthew 22:31-32; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 2 Peter 3:8; Hebrews 10:19-25

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July 9, 2022



It's astounding how much filth a dog can accumulate. My dog, Blue, seeks out opportunities to smell like a dog, such as plunging into mud puddles, crawling through compost piles, and rolling over nasty things she finds in the grass.

Blue's attraction to stinky things is a doggie characteristic. To her, the sweet-smelling shampoo I use to bathe her is something unnatural. At the first opportunity, she rolls in the grass to restore her doggie scent, and thus perpetuates a cycle of rotation between clean and unclean. If she smells like a

dog, then she's unwelcome in human company. That's why I have to give her a bath, which transforms her from her natural doggie state and opens the way for her to fellowship with people.

There is a spiritual application here, particularly since the doggie smell Blue appreciates has a connection to dead and dying things. It's that rotting stench of death that I have to remove from her. She can't do it herself because it's not in her nature to do so, and because she is incapable of bathing in a way that is acceptable in human company. I must do this for her, whether she wants it or not. The irony is that, in making her clean, the doggie smell of death rubs off on me, and I become unclean and unacceptable in human company (particularly the company of my wife). I then have to take a shower and get clean before I can reenter polite society.

To be honest, I probably don't bathe Blue enough, but when she becomes unbearable to my wife and I, then she gets a bath even if she's had one the previous day. She's a dog, and can't change her nature, but she's still my dog, and I have chosen to have her in my life.

This is an example of how Blue helps me understand something in God's Word. In this case, it's that baffling ritual of the water of cleansing. In Numbers 19, God specifies how to prepare the special water to be used in the ritual cleansing of someone who has come in contact with death. That could mean touching a corpse, or even being in the same house with a dead body. A person tainted by death carries that contamination wherever he or she goes. Anything or anyone they touch becomes tainted in the same way. If the corruption is not contained, eventually the blight of death spreads throughout the entire population.

That's not good for a holy kingdom of priests set apart by the Creator as His instrument of redemption for all humanity. God created and called Israel to be the shining example of how people of every nation could choose life and live. He is, after all, the God of the living, not of the dead. Death is separation from the Creator; life is connection to Him. Thus, it's vital that the Covenant Nation, which the Creator chose to be His vessel of life to the nations, understands and lives by this reality. It's just as vital for everyone adopted into the Covenant Nation to understand this. We may not have a Levitical priesthood and a Temple and an altar, but we do have the realities that those holy elements herald.

Still, it's hard to comprehend why God required Israel to procure a flawless red cow (a heifer), slay it outside the camp, burn the carcass with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool, and collect the ashes. Those ashes would be kept outside the camp so that anyone who comes in contact with death could have access to them. Then comes the bizarre ritual:

For the unclean one, they are to take some of the ash of the burnt purification offering, and pour some fresh water into a jar. Then a clean person will take some hyssop, dip it into the water, and, sprinkle it on the tent, all of the furnishings, and the people who were there, as well as the one touching the bone, the one killed, the corpse or the grave. The clean person will sprinkle the unclean one on the third and seventh days. He is to purify himself on the seventh day, and on the seventh day he is to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and at evening he will be clean.

Numbers 19:18-19 TLV

This ritual begins to make sense when we consider it as an illustration of mankind's relationship with our Creator. Scripture tells us that a thousand years is as a single day to the Almighty. The six thousand years of recorded human history take on a new perspective when we look at it them as six days. It was on the first day that our first ancestors came into contact with death. That's when they chose to separate themselves from the Creator by declaring with their actions that they, not He, would designate what is right and what is wrong. It was their son Cain who carried that choice to the logical conclusion. When he took the life of his brother, Abel, he declared by his actions that he could choose who lives and who dies. These are things the Creator has reserved to Himself alone. When humanity declared otherwise, we declared ourselves to be His rivals, and therefore cut ourselves off from the life of which He is the only Source.

But our Creator loves humanity so much that He went to great lengths to restore our relationship. Abraham and his seed walked that path in faith, but it wasn't until the fourth millennium after creation that their faith became our sight. That would have been the third day after Adam and Eve brought the stench of death into the world. It was on that day that the prophetic symbol of the Red Heifer was walked out by the Lamb of God slain for the sin of the world. This is what we learn from the writer of Hebrews:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have boldness to enter into the Holies by the blood of *Yeshua*. He inaugurated a new and living way for us through the curtain—that is, His flesh. We also have a *Kohen Gadol* [High Priest] over God's household. So let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and body washed with pure water. Let us hold fast

the unwavering confession of hope, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds. And do not neglect our own meetings, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another—and all the more so as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:19-25 TLV)

This is the Lamb of God Who knew no sin, but became sin for our sakes. He was clean, but became unclean by cleansing us. He did this when we didn't know any better. Our fallen human nature was such that we didn't even know we were contaminated with death and unable to enter intimate fellowship with our Maker. That's how our Messiah could atone for the sin of the world. That was His sovereign choice. Our choice is whether to follow through with the cleansing ritual and allow Him to complete it on the seventh day – the other Day the writer of Hebrews mentions. It's the Day of the LORD, the day He promises to gather all His scattered people and sprinkle clean water on them to cleanse them from all their uncleanness for His Name's sake.

We don't want to miss that event. It's not just a ritualistic Jewish thing from ancient days, but a vibrant spiritual truth for all Israel – the native born and the stranger adopted from the nations. This is the work of Israel's Messiah, the holy Servant Who will sprinkle the nations with the cleansing water and blood that flowed from His wounded side.