

Ezekiel 36:16-38

This is the Haftarah for the Numbers 19 Torah reading.

Ezekiel was not only a prophet, he was a priest. So it's not unusual to find references to the Temple rituals in his writings.

"The vocabulary of defilement, cleansing, sprinkling, and pure water [employed by Ezekiel] are all used in connection with the rite of the red heifer."

Ezekiel 36:16-17 - "Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman (*niddah*)."

Menstrual blood - because it was designed to nourish new life, yet does not - it is reckoned as a picture of "death" rather than life, and this is what the Ashes of the Red Heifer are meant to cleanse.

Ezekiel uses this ritual defilement as a metaphor for Israel's moral defilement.

Ezekiel 36:18 - "Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it:"

In other words, whereas in Numbers, *natural* death ritually defiles, in Ezekiel, *unnatural* death (i.e. murder, shedding of blood) morally defiles.

The Targum has "the blood of righteous men, that opposed and reproved them for their sinful ways"

"their idols" = *gilluw-* - idols, from a root that can also mean "dung" in reference to the shame of idolatry and its valuelessness.

The Red Heifer was to be wholly burnt, along with its dung. (**Numbers 19:5**)

In this picture, God acts in the role of the priest, sprinkling Israel with the waters of separation.

Whereas **Numbers 19** provides for the ritual purification of individual Israelites in order that they may dwell in the camp, Ezekiel shows how it is fulfilled in the spiritual and moral purification of the entire people of Israel in order that they may dwell in the Promise Land.

Ezekiel 36:20 - "And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land."

Rashi - "Behold these are God's people, and He had no power to save them." In Midrash Lamentations Rabbah (Proem 15).

Ezekiel 36:23 - "And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes."

This is the insight that true cleansing is inward - God will be sanctified "in you"

Historically, He will vindicate His name (which their exile profaned) by returning them to the Land. But spiritually it points to the days of Messiah:

- **Hosea 1:11** - "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel."

Ezekiel 36:25 - "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."

The Targum makes the reference specific: "I will forgive your sins, as one is cleansed by the water of sprinkling, and the ashes of a heifer, which is for a sin offering"

Christ crucified is the Red Heifer burnt offering turned to ashes by His suffering, the Holy Spirit is represented by the Waters of Siloam, and Christ is also the priest who sprinkles.

The inward result is profound, described in the remaining verses:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

The Targum has: "a heart fearing, and a spirit fearing ...and I will break the heart of the wicked, which is hard as a stone"

The rabbis said this refers to the "evil inclination" (Babylonian Talmud, Succah, fol. 52. 1.) The entire prophecy refers to the time of Messiah (Debarim Rabba, fol. 242. 2. & Shirhashirim Rabba, fol. 3. 2.)

Targum: "my spirit" = My Holy Spirit

Ezekiel 36:31 - "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations."

At the time of being cleansed, repentance precedes the cleansing. And anytime we look back at ourselves, this is our reaction.

Ezekiel 36:35 - "And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited."

Repentance and the cleansing returns us to the innocence of the Garden and we become as little children.

Ezekiel 36:38 - "As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD."

Targum: "as the holy people, as a people that is cleansed, and comes to Jerusalem at the feasts of the passover"

This passage in Ezekiel as well as **Numbers 19** were read three weeks before Passover at *Shabbat Parah*. All Israelites were required to partake in the Passover sacrifice, and to do so required that the person be ritually pure.

See <https://thetorah.com/the-red-heifer-in-synagogue-purifying-israel-from-sin/>