



Chapter 3

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RED HEIFER SACRIFICE

The area of the Mount of Olives was an important region in New Testament times. It was where the Miphkad Altar was located. This Third Altar of the Temple was where the special sin offerings which typified the sufferings of Jesus mentioned by the author of the Book of Hebrews were burnt to ashes, and it was the same altar at which the most important of all the sin offerings as far as the Jewish authorities were concerned was burnt to ashes. This sacrifice was that of the Red Heifer. This female cow which was young and never yoked or mounted by a bullock was selected within the precincts of the Temple and taken *eastward* across the double tiered arched bridge that spanned the Kidron Ravine between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. In fact, that very bridge was called the “Bridge of the Red Heifer” (*Shekalim* 4:2). The heifer was led alive by the high priest and other priests eastward through the Miphkad Gate (Nehemiah 3:31) and over the double tiered bridge up to the Miphkad Altar just outside the limits of the Camp of Israel. It was then killed and burnt to ashes. This Third Altar of the Temple had a pit associated with it for burning the heifer. Details of these matters can be found in the Jewish Mishnah by reading

Middoth 1:3; 2:4; *Yoma* 7:2; along with the Talmud in *Yoma* 68b and *Zebahim* 105b. Moses explained it: “Ye shall give her [the calf] unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face [that is, on the east side of the Sanctuary because God figuratively sat on his throne in the Holy of Holies and He faced eastward to view all the activities of his people assembled in or in front of the Sanctuary]” (Numbers 19:3). To be “before the face of God” meant to be *east* of Him in all the geographical associations involving the Sanctuaries.

The Red Heifer and Jesus

Look at this important sacrifice called the Red Heifer. The ashes of this sin offering were to purify the people of their ritualistic sins. This was essentially why this Third Altar of the Temple was located “without the camp” so that the ritualistically defiled among the Israelites could be purified by the sprinkling of its ashen waters and then re-enter the Camp and into the Temple itself. The early Christians deemed it typically essential that Jesus should purify the whole world of their sins in this same locale “without the camp.” The early Jewish records, which I will give in detail in a further chapter, clearly show that the sacrifice of the Red Heifer was certainly outside the Camp area of Israel in the time of Jesus and near the summit of the Mount of Olives, but slightly downslope in a westward direction so that the priests burning the Heifer could see the high priest who returned to the Temple and was finally standing near the Temple’s outer curtain. And recall, this spot on the Mount of Olives for killing the Red Heifer was identical with the place “where the ashes are poured out” of all the animal sacrifices that were offered in the main Temple and where the other sin offerings I have mentioned previously were burnt to ashes. One should remember as well that this Third Altar was also patterned after the altar of Cain referred to in Genesis chapter four.

All the rituals of the Red Heifer were performed east of the Temple and Jerusalem. Even when one considers the walls of

Jerusalem, the only “gate” through which all the sin offerings were taken which I have so far mentioned in this book, including the Red Heifer, was THE GATE in the EAST WALL, called in the Bible the “Miphkad Gate,” which led people in and out of the Court of the Gentiles on the Temple mount. We have Jewish records from the second century that the Temple region had five gates which led people in and out of the Temple. Note again the early Jewish record.

“There were five gates to the Temple mount: the two Huldah Gates on the south, that served for coming in and going out; the Kiponus Gate on the west, that served for coming in and going out; the Tadi Gate on the north that was not used at all; the Eastern Gate on which was portrayed the Palace of Shushan. Through THIS [Gate] the high priest that burned the [Red] Heifer, and the heifer, and all that aided him went forth to the Mount of Olives” (*Middoth* 1:3, capitals and italics mine).

The Red Heifer was led by the high priest to the Mount of Olives to be killed and burnt to ashes.

The Red Heifer and the Blood Of Jesus

The sacrifice of the Red Heifer was connected specifically with the Mount of Olives. No other area in the Jerusalem region was ever considered as proper in performing this most sacred of sacrifices. And significantly, the author of the Book of Hebrews compared the ashes of this Red Heifer, which were mixed with pure spring water, with the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus which occurred at his crucifixion. He considered the sacrifice of the Red Heifer to be a physical ritual and a type of Jesus, but the sacrifice of Jesus was an actual spiritual sanctification.

“If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ” (Hebrews 9:13,14).

The “sprinkling” of the ashen waters and the “dripping of Jesus’ blood” at his crucifixion were typically equated by the author of the

Book of Hebrews. In the case of the physical Israelites, it was the mixing of the ashes of the Red Heifer with water that allowed the people to be sprinkled for purification. This ashen water was actually a substitute for blood which was ordinarily used in other sacrificial rites to purify people and material items. The sprinkling was especially to purify people from any uncleanness they may have encountered that rendered them unfit to approach God in His "Camp" or His residence in the Temple. For certain purification purposes, this sprinkling had to be done "without the camp" and this was done in the Jerusalem area at the Miphkad Altar region on the Mount of Olives where the Red Heifer was burnt to ashes. Actually, there were different degrees of purification depending on the types of defilements to which the Israelites had been exposed and contaminated. For those who were defiled only in a limited sense but were still allowed into the "Camp" area, they were permitted to be sprinkled with the ashen waters at a purification site at the east entrance to the Temple. There were other such sites at the twenty-four priestly cities located around Judaea. But, in a symbolic sense, for Jesus to purify the world by his sacrifice, he was crucified in the main area of Jerusalem where the most defiled had to be purified. This site of purification was "without the camp." And remarkably, the blood of Jesus was sprinkled at the main purification area on the Mount of Olives, like the sprinkling of the ashen waters of the Red Heifer where its "red" color was to show its association with "blood."

There was great significance to this sprinkling of the ashen waters of the Red Heifer because even the priests in order to be consecrated and the Temple itself were purified by the sprinkling of those waters (e.g. Numbers 8:7; Ezekiel 43:26). It is no wonder that the author of Hebrews compared the same sprinkling of the blood of Jesus as being of much more significance than sprinkling the ashen waters of the Red Heifer because Jesus' blood had the spiritual effect of purifying every person on earth from sins, even the most defiled, and no matter how serious the defilements of the sin-

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ners happened to be (Hebrews 2:9). It is this scope of purification by the blood of Jesus that the New Testament writers were trying to demonstrate.

What is pertinent in a geographical sense to our present discussion is the fact that this symbolic comparison of the Red Heifer with Jesus by the author of Hebrews helps to direct a person to the place where Jesus' blood was sprinkled for mankind's purification. His blood was shed at the main purification region on the Mount of Olives. And besides that, the Book of Hebrews is not the only Christian source that saw this symbolic comparison or equation of the Red Heifer with Jesus.

Christians Knew the Red Heifer Symbolized Jesus

In the "Letter of Barnabas," which was written by a knowledgeable Jew about A.D.90 and one who was well acquainted with the sacrificial system of the Temple, the author also stated that the Red Heifer in Christian circles was identified as being typical of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion. He stated most dogmatically: "*The calf IS Jesus: the sinful men offering it are those who led him to the slaughter*" (8:2). Just as the high priest and his attendants led the Red Heifer from the Temple eastward, through the Miphkad Gate and across the double tiered arched bridge over the Kidron Ravine and up to the Miphkad Altar on the Mount of Olives, the author of the "Letter of Barnabas" said the priests "led him [Jesus] to the slaughter." And true enough, in the ritual it was the priests who led the calf EASTWARD across the "Bridge of the Red Heifer." All people knew these facts who lived in first century Jerusalem. But counter to these well-known facts is the supposition so often met with today that Jesus was crucified in the western (or northern) part of Jerusalem. Such a belief in a *western* crucifixion of Jesus cannot equate the Red Heifer or any of its rituals with Jesus. It is clear that such a belief in a *western* crucifixion site is looking to an area that is diametrically opposite the proper direction and is looking to an area completely devoid of any ceremonies associated with the Red

Heifer. The western (or northern) regions of Jerusalem are disqualified.

This “Letter of Barnabas” and the “Book of Hebrews” in the New Testament are important first century testimonies showing that the early Christians in the area of Jerusalem were well aware that those sin offerings which they mentioned typified Jesus. These offerings were precisely equated by them with Jesus and his suffering. They all knew that these types of animal sacrifices were taken EAST of the Temple up to the Mount of Olives to be burnt to ashes. If Jesus was reckoned as the “calf” called the Red Heifer (as Barnabas stated) then any first century Jew would immediately associate that Red Heifer with the only place in the Jerusalem area where such a sacrifice could be legally performed. That place was at the summit of the Mount of Olives! And even more than that, what does the author of Hebrews state that Christians allegorically ought to do on account of these geographical facts associated with the Temple ceremonies? He states that Christians should leave behind the old city of Jerusalem and go forth unto the same area that Jesus went when he carried his cross-piece, called in Latin the *patibulum*, to the place of his crucifixion.

“Let us go forth therefore unto him [Jesus] *without* the camp [to where the sin offerings were burnt], bearing his reproach [a reference to the cross-piece to which the hands of Jesus were nailed]” (Hebrews 13:13).

As a matter of interest, the author had just stated in this context that Christians allegorically had an altar to which they ought to go (Hebrews 13:10). That particular Third Altar of the Temple was that altar near the summit of the Mount of Olives. Though his illustration was a figure of speech, the author had this singular altar (the Third Altar) in mind because it suited his allegorical illustration in an exact geographical way. He described it as an altar “whereof they [the priests who served the physical Temple] have no right to eat” (Hebrews 13:10). And remarkably, in regard to the sacrificial

animals which the author of Hebrews mentioned in his illustration, the priests ARE INDEED FORBIDDEN TO EAT THEM! This is what Moses commanded. “And no sin offering, whereof any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of the congregation to reconcile withal in the holy place, SHALL BE EATEN: it shall be burnt in the fire” (Leviticus 6:30). This is why the author of Hebrews stated, concerning the sin offerings that typified Jesus, that the priests “have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle” (Hebrews 13:10). His identification regarding this command forbidding the eating of these animals could not be more exact. Any one familiar with the Temple ceremonies in the first century would have understood this point.

The Altar that is Meant for Christians

That particular altar (the Third Altar) referred to allegorically by the author of the Book of Hebrews on which those sin offerings that he mentioned were burnt to ashes was the Miphkad Altar located near the southern summit of the Mount of Olives directly EAST of the Temple. There can really be no doubt that any first century Jewish person identifying these sacrificial animals as typifying the sufferings of Jesus, and even though the illustrations are allegorical, would of necessity have placed the crucifixion of Jesus “*without the camp*” and on the Mount of Olives in order to retain any geographical compatibility within the allegorical illustrations.

Even the use of the allegorical method by the author of Hebrews in the above interpretations demands an EASTERN geographical context in relation to the Temple and Jerusalem in order to make sense out of his illustrations. Look at a modern example that can show this. In a similar way, would it not be silly for an American newspaper in San Francisco, which is in the western part of the United States, to display an allegorical headline during World War II describing a ship bringing back the wounded and dead from the Pacific Theatre of war as it entered San Francisco Bay with a banner saying “The Statue of Liberty Weeps for her Children” based on

the theme of Jeremiah when he said “Rachel wept for her children.” What? The “Statue of Liberty”? That monument is located in New York harbor, not in San Francisco Bay. More appropriately for San Francisco would be: “The Golden Gate Weeps For Her Children.”

On the other hand, if it were the New York Times displaying the headline, which of course publishes its newspaper in the EASTERN part of the United States and describing the same type of ship but this time coming from the European (eastern) Theatre of war, the allegorical headline would make perfectly good sense and it would be appropriate. Similarly, all of the allegorical illustrations in the Book of Hebrews and in the “Letter of Barnabas” that describe the sin offerings as being typical of the sufferings of Jesus, demand that the “Statue of Liberty” of their allegorical illustrations be located in “New York Harbor,” not out west in San Francisco Bay. This is the only way allegories can be sensible.

This modern example is quite relevant regarding the question of where Jesus was crucified because most people today are saying his crucifixion took place on the western side of Jerusalem and not the eastern side that all the typical narratives demand. To Jews of the first century, this is just like saying the “Statue of Liberty” is in the west. Using such erroneous geographical anomalies in allegorical illustrations simply won’t work with the rationale of any intelligent person. So, even the use of allegory by the early Christians concerning the crucifixion of Jesus insists that the EASTERN area of Jerusalem (and “*without* the camp”) is the only reasonable and acceptable geographical answer to the site of the crucifixion. But, if Jesus were indeed crucified in the WEST to satisfy the area of the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or crucified in the NORTH to equate with the Garden Tomb area (which sites had no sin offerings associated with them whatever), the allegorical illustrations of the Book of Hebrews and “Barnabas” would not only be inappropriate, any first century Jew would call such misuse of these allegorical factors as patently absurd! Whether one uses allegory to

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explain the teachings of the Book of Hebrews (or one uses literal methods), the geographical outcome is the same. Nothing makes sense unless one views the scene in an easterly direction from the main Temple at Jerusalem.

The appropriateness of this *eastern* region is shown by Ezekiel because he stated quite categorically that the sin offerings designated to be taken to the “appointed place” (the *Miphkad* Altar) were located “without the sanctuary” (Ezekiel 43:21), and these offerings are the ones mentioned by the author of the Book of Hebrews. These animals were taken through the *eastern* gate of the Temple. This *eastern* gate was given a proper name by Ezekiel. He called it “the Gate of [or, to] the Outward Sanctuary” (Ezekiel 44:1, the KJV has the proper translation). Though Ezekiel’s Temple was an ideal one, the rabbis still used much of its geographical terms as applying to the actual Temple. This single gate was the one that led to this “Outward Sanctuary” which was called the Beth ha-Deshen. It was a sanctified site that was designated a “clean place” where the Red Heifer and other sin offerings were burnt to ashes.

This is why the place was given a divine status by being called the “Outward Sanctuary.” The special holiness of this “Outward Sanctuary” was assured because this was where the Shekinah retreated and continued to reside in the time of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 11:23), apparently until after the Babylonian Captivity. We should recall that wherever the Shekinah resides, is technically where the Sanctuary is. So, the “Outward Sanctuary” became even more sanctified than the “Inward Sanctuary” which was the main Temple of Ezekiel, because the Shekinah left the western part of the Temple and went to its extreme eastern part (to the *Miphkad* Altar) at the top of the Mount of Olives. Indeed, this Altar at the “Outward Sanctuary” became more sanctified still, when Jesus was sacrificed in that same general area in A.D.30. It was to this *eastern* Altar that the Book of Hebrews tells Christians to bear His reproach.