

Water and Blood: Ingredients in Purification

In our articles thus far we have been considering the salient features of the beginning of the world and human life: the creation, its corruption, its demise, and its destruction. Except for Noah the story of the human race would be ended, and it would have ended without a point. Man appears by the hand of God. Man disappears by the hand of God. No evident purpose would have been revealed and no one would be around to explain it or complain about it. Fortunately the story does not end here; life on earth was re-created through Noah. Unfortunately, the story of man resumes as in the beginning; sin spreads and abounds. Fortunately, this time it will not end in catastrophe, but focuses on the coming of the Christ into the world. The Bible message will now prepare for and declare the coming of God into the world of mortal men that He might, by His selfless work and suffering, lead men out of a deep, dark, and hopeless abyss into a world of sublime beauty, blessing, and joy... all "to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:14)."

Before we move forward with our narrative, we need to back up for a moment to consider two important elements introduced in the creation/re-creation account which have great significance in the whole biblical message. These elements are water and blood. Looking first at water we find that it plays an important role in the Great Flood. While this is so obvious it would seem not even interesting enough to make note of it, we will find water has implications not immediately evident. Water will play an important role in cleansing man of his sin and become a line of demarcation between the saved and the lost. From the perspective of the pre-flood world, the waters of the flood can be seen as God's agent of destruction sent to cleanse the world of corrupted man. But, viewed from Noah's perspective, water can also be seen as an agent of purification and salvation. In the New Testament, the apostle Peter, referring to the days of Noah, observed that the flood was something like baptism. He wrote, "Baptism, which corresponds to this [the waters of the flood], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience...(1 Peter 3:21 ESV)." Water will be seen throughout the whole of the Bible as a purification agent.

The other important element introduced in the early chapters of Genesis is blood. In chapter 8 we see Noah disembark from the ark and offer a great animal sacrifice to God, acknowledging His providential care. God reveals to Noah His covenant with the creation to "never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth... (Genesis 8:31)." He blesses Noah and his sons and instructs them to multiply and fill the earth (9:1). In Genesis 9:2-8 God gives every living creature to Noah for food, but proceeds to put a restriction on their use. Along with the restriction he teaches Noah some lessons about life. First, he is not to eat the flesh of an animal with its blood in it. The blood is its life and man shall not eat it. The inference is that life is sacred, a gift from God, and even in animals man is to have respect for it. Secondly, if man sheds man's blood, i.e. one man kills another man as Cain killed Abel, the blood of the murderer will be required of him, meaning his life. We conclude from this disclosure that

sin has consequences, serious consequences. When blood is required for wrong-doing, we are talking about a very serious matter.

Throughout the balance of Scripture we will see a persistent and certain connection between water and blood, two elements needed for purification. When we look at the long history of animal sacrifice in Israel, rites which only postponed accountability because "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (Hebrews 10:4)," we see a regular pattern of ceremonial cleansings with water in preparation for the sprinkling of blood for purification. This process will continue to the cross where, when the spear was put into Christ's side, water and blood poured forth. An inseparable link is forged between water and blood, and the purification that comes from them. We will see that baptism (meaning immersion in water) will be the linchpin between sinful man and the blood of the Son of God, the only means for removing sin from man and purifying him for access to the eternal God.

[For the next time read Genesis chapters 12-22 or, for a shorter reading, Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-6; 22:1-18.]