

# Red Heifer Born in Israel -- Harbinger of Messiah?

**Why all the uproar in Israel over the birth of a "Holy Cow"? Could this "red heifer" lead to the rebuilding of the Temple of God? What is the symbolic meaning of the "red heifer" sacrifice? Even Solomon, in all his wisdom, is said not to have understood the true purpose and significance of the red heifer. Had he understood it, perhaps he would not have turned to sin in his old age.**

**William F. Dankenbring**

"She stares out at the world through dewy eyes, stumbling on awkward legs, dipping into her trough with abandon, oblivious to the soaring hopes and apocalyptic fears that have spread with the news of her birth.

"Watched over by an armed guard in a skullcap and visited by rabbis and other seekers of meaning, this rust-colored, six-month-old heifer is hailed as a sign of the coming of the Messiah and decried as a walking atomic bomb.

"Of a variety believed extinct for centuries, the red heifer is seen by some as the missing link needed for religious Jews to rebuild their ancient temple in Jerusalem. Sacrificing the animal in its third year and using its ashes in a purification rite would allow Jews to return 2,000 years later to the temple site, a spot holy to both Jews and Muslims.

"With tensions already high over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to build a Jewish neighborhood in the section of Jerusalem that Palestinians consider theirs, many fear that the calf's arrival could create an explosive situation."

So wrote Ethan Bronner in the *Boston Globe*, several months ago. The red heifer he marveled at is now about one year old, and is named "Melody."

## *The Miraculous Birth of "Melody"*

Melody, a year-old red heifer born at Kfar Hasidim, Israel, has stirred up a storm of controversy and theological debate in Israel. Gershon Solomon of the Temple Faithful Institute says, "The red heifer is one of the most important signs that we are living in a special time." The heifer is believed to be the first red heifer born in the Holy Land in the last two thousand years.

Rabbi Ariel of the Jerusalem Temple Institute was among a group of rabbis that examined the heifer when it was six months old, sired from the semen of a Swedish bull artificially inseminated into a black and white holstein. Their conclusion -- the young cow met

both the Biblical and Talmudic requirements at that early stage of development.

The red heifer could be sacrificed just before Rosh Hoshana, the Jewish New Year, in 1998, or anytime during the following year. This would, according to the Bible and the Talmud, pave the way for the restoration and rebuilding of the Temple of God in Jerusalem!

Modern secular Jews fear that some extremist group may interpret the birth of the red heifer as a sign to rebuild the Temple of God now, and may use the red heifer as an excuse to destroy the Muslim mosques on the Temple Mount, thus initiating a new round of Israeli-Arab war in the Middle East. Some secular Jews therefore see Melody's birth as a direct threat to the peace process, and the Palestinians themselves are anxious about the possible repercussions. The liberal Israeli newspaper Haaretz claims, "The potential harm from this heifer is far greater than the destructive properties of a terrorist bomb." It went so far as to recommend that Melody be shot.

Says Menachem Friedman, an expert on religious affairs at Bar-Ilan University, Melody's birth creates "a very delicate situation." He went on, "People are looking for those signs, and talking seriously about it."

Hundreds of Israelis and tourists have flocked to get a peek at the red heifer. Rabbi Shmaria Shore, the rabbi at Kfar Hasidim, stated that pure red heifers seem to have died out in Israel since the post-temple period, and to see a red heifer without any white or black spots is very rare. He points out that Melody has a few white hairs in her tail, and her eyelashes start off as red but turn to black, and therefore she may not be the genuine article. However, at this point he says there is nothing yet to disqualify the animal. According to Rabbi Shore, the pedigree of the animal from the black and white holstein stock makes its birth a *miracle* as well as a *sign*. He indicated that her burnt red color is the right color, and that the birth of such a red heifer was totally unanticipated.

The news about the birth of a red heifer is being discussed and debated throughout the country of Israel, in newspapers, on television, and even in the Knesset. People are wondering what this "sign" means for the country. The debate over Melody is one of the most bizarre theological debates to rage in Israel since its inception in 1948, and is an indication of the growing rupture separating secular Jews and their religious neighbors.

### *A Unique "SIGN" of the Times*

Some Israelis rate the miraculous birth of a red heifer as one of the greatest "signs" of the age in which we live -- one of the most significant events to occur since the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.! Some consider it as important as the establishment of the state of Israel itself in 1948, and the return of Jerusalem to the Jewish people in 1967, in the "Six Day War." Why is there such incredible excitement in Israel?

The facts are that the Temple of God cannot be rebuilt without the sacrifice of a red heifer. Nor could a priesthood function unless each priest is sprinkled with the ashes of a red heifer, mixed with water from the pool of Siloam. Also, many believe that Messiah cannot come

until a Temple is rebuilt. Therefore, to start this sequence of events, there must first be a red heifer which meets the halachic requirements which can be sacrificed!

No red heifer, then no sanctified priesthood, and no Temple -- and therefore no Messiah!

### *The Search for the Ashes of the Last Red Heifer*

The last red heifer sacrificed by the Jewish priesthood was killed shortly before the Jewish rebellion against the Romans which began in 66 A.D. The ashes of the heifer, along with treasures of the Temple, and Temple artifacts, were then removed for safe-keeping and hidden in a place of security.

According to many rabbis, the ashes of the last red heifer slain as a sacrifice must be combined with the ashes of a new red heifer sacrifice, in order to purify the location for the new Temple, the priesthood, and the nation of Israel.

J. R. Church, in his article "The Search for the Ashes of the Red Heifer," in *Prophecy in the News* magazine (May 1997 issue), relates that archaeologist Vendyl Jones is currently embarked on an effort to find the ashes of the last red heifer sacrificed in Israel. Says Church:

"Since 1977, a concerted effort to locate the missing ashes has led archaeologist Vendyl Jones to explore a cave near the Dead Sea. He believes a copper scroll, discovered in 1952, describes the 'Cave of the Column' as the one in which the ashes of the red heifer were hidden. For the past twenty years several excavations have been made.

"In 1988, his team discovered a juglet of oil which fits an ancient description of the oil used for anointing priests and kings. In 1992, Jones opened a hidden chamber in the 'Cave of the Column' complex described in the copper scroll. Inside was a silo containing over 600 kilograms of spices used for the temple incense offerings.

"In his upcoming dig, he plans to open the seventh hidden chamber of the cave. According to the copper scroll, this chamber should contain the ashes of the red heifer and the garments of the high priest. Jones is hopeful that his group will obtain the necessary excavation permits, under the auspices of *The Israel Institute of Talmudic Publications* and the famous Rabbi Adin Aven Yisrael Steinsaltz, editor of THE TALMUD -- THE STEINSALTZ EDITION. Jones is presently awaiting a permit from the Israeli Antiquities Authority to continue their dig.

"Jones says he has only two more years in which to complete his quest to find important temple artifacts before time runs out. He began his dig in 1977, the thirtieth year of Israel. He wants to conclude the search in Israel's fiftieth year. Jones believes that these are the years of the priesthood, as recorded in the Mosaic law:

*"Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, **from thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old**, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation. This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things' (Numbers 4:2-4).*

"Next year, Israel will be fifty years old. Perhaps by then, the clay pot containing the ashes of the red heifer will be discovered. A find of that magnitude could be one of

the most significant archaeological discoveries in history" (Church, *Prophecy in the News*, May 1997, p.9).

It is fascinating that so many lines of evidence are all presently coalescing, and combining together, bringing about the strong probability that the Temple of God will be rebuilt soon! It could be rebuilt by the end of this century, or the year 2000!

### ***The Awesome Significance of the Red Heifer***

What is the symbolic meaning of the "red heifer" sacrifice? How was it used in the religious practice of ancient Israel?

According to Scripture, the greatest defilement of all is death. Therefore, the sin offering for its purification was itself the most marked. Sin renders fellowship with God impossible; sin was death; it causes death. As Paul the apostle wrote, "The wages of sin is DEATH" (Rom.6:23). He also wrote, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and DEATH BY SIN: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom.5:12). "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom.3:23). Death is evidence of the power and control that sin has over human lives.

Therefore the Law of God made exceptional providence for ceremonial purification from sin. Says Alfred Edersheim in his book *The Temple: Its Sacrifices and Services*,

"'A red heifer without spot,' that is, without any white or black hair on its hide, without 'blemish, and on which never yoke came,' was to be sacrificed as a *sin-offering* (Num.19:9, 17), and that outside the camp, not in the sanctuary, and by the son of, or by the presumptive successor to the high priest. The blood of this sacrifice was to be sprinkled seven times with the finger, not on the altar, but towards the sanctuary; then the whole animal -- skin, flesh, blood, and dung -- burned, the priest casting into the midst of the burning 'cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet.' The ashes of this sacrifice were to be gathered by 'a man that is clean,' and laid up 'without the camp in a clean place.' But the priests, he that burned the red heifer, and who gathered her ashes, were to be 'unclean until the even,' to wash their clothes, and the two former also to 'bathe,' their flesh 'in water' (Num.19:7, 8)."

The red heifer offering is a sin-offering, yet it differs from all other sin-offerings. Says Edersheim:

"The sacrifice was to be of pure red colour; one 'upon which never came yoke'; and a female, all other sin offerings for the congregation being males (Lev.4:14). These particulars symbolically point to life in its freshness, fullness, and fruitfulness -- that is, the fullest life and the spring of life. But what distinguished it even more from all others was, that it was a sacrifice offered once for all (at least so long as its ashes lasted); that its blood was sprinkled, not on the altar, but outside the camp towards the sanctuary; and that it was *wholly* burnt, along with cedarwood, as the symbol of imperishable existence; hyssop, as that of purification from corruption; and 'scarlet,' which from its colour was the emblem of life. . . . But even this is not all. The gathered ashes with running water were sprinkled on the third and seventh days on that which was to be purified. Assuredly, if death meant 'the wages of sin,' this purification pointed, in all its details, to 'the gift of God,' which is 'eternal life,' through the sacrifice of Him in whom is the fullness of life" (p.279-281).

There is a Jewish tradition that Solomon, who understood all the meanings of all the ordinances of God, was stumped by the symbolism of the red heifer. Jewish tradition itself was unable to understand the meaning of the red heifer; Jews to this day are in ignorance of its symbolism.

What does it really signify?

### *The Awesome Symbolism of the Red Heifer*

The red heifer pictured the sacrifice of God's "only begotten Son," Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah (John 3:16). The femaleness of the sacrifice pictured Christ as the perfectly submissive sacrifice.

The colour "red" of the sacrifice pictured His being fully and completely "human," having partaken of human nature (John 1:14; Heb.2:14). The very name "Adam" or "man" in Hebrew means "red," or "ruddy."

The red heifer was sacrificed very rarely, and its ashes served to purify so long as they existed, until they ran out. Even so, Jesus Christ "offered *one sacrifice* for sins *for ever*" (Heb.10:12); we are "sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*" (v.10), "For by *one offering* he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (v.14).

The red heifer was also led up to the Mount of Olives, outside the city of Jerusalem, to be sacrificed. "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered *without [outside] the gate*. Let us go forth therefore unto him *without the camp*, bearing his reproach" (Heb.13:12-13). Like the red heifer, Jesus Christ was actually led from the Temple porticoes to the Mount of Olives, where He was slain for our sins, in full view of the Temple itself. The Roman centurion at the crucifixion of Jesus "saw the earthquake, *and those things that were done*" (Matt.27:50-54), including the rending of the Temple veil, or massive curtain, from his vantage point at the crucifixion site. This means he must have been standing on the Mount of Olives, just east of the Temple Mount, the only point outside the city where the entrance to the Temple, and the veil, would have been visible.

What a perfect picture the red heifer offering is of Christ, the Son of God without blemish or spot, who "became sin [i.e., a sin offering] for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God through him" (II Cor.5:21).

The Jews were extremely precise as to the details of the red heifer ceremony. Says Edersheim: "The first object was to obtain a proper 'red heifer' for the sacrifice. The *Mishnah* (*Parah*, i., ii.) states the needful age of such a *red heifer* as from two to four, and even five years; the colour of its hide, two white or black hairs springing from the same follicle disqualifying it; and how, if she had been put to any use, though only a cloth had been laid on her, she would no longer answer the requirement that upon her 'never came yoke'" (p.282-283).

Seven days before the red heifer was to be killed, the priest appointed to perform the task

was separated and kept in the Temple where he was daily sprinkled with the ashes of the previous red heifers. He was to wear his white priestly garments when bringing the sacrifice. There was an arched roadway that led from the Eastern Gate of the Temple, across the Kidron Valley, to the Mount of Olives. It was "double arched, that is, arched over the supporting pillars, for fear of any possible pollution through the ground upwards. Over this the procession passed" -- even as Christ Himself was led in a procession from the Temple, outside the city of Jerusalem, to the very area where the red heifers were sacrificed, on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Entrance to the Temple.

Edersheim continues:

"On the Mount of Olives, the elders of Israel were already in waiting. First, the priest immersed his whole body, then he approached the pile of cedar-, pine-, and fig-wood which was heaped up like a pyramid, but having an opening in the middle, looking towards the west [the Temple]. Into this the red heifer was thrust, and bound, with its head towards the south and its face looking to the west, the priest standing east of the sacrifice, his face, of course, also turned westwards. Slaying the sacrifice with his right hand, he caught up the blood in his left. Seven times he dipped his finger in it, sprinkling it towards the Most Holy Place, which he was supposed to have in full view over the Porch of Solomon or through the eastern gate. Then, immediately descending, he kindled the fire. As soon as the flames burst forth, the priest, standing outside the pit in which the pile was built up, took cedarwood, hyssop, and 'scarlet' wool, asking three times as he held up each: 'Is this cedarwood? Is this hyssop? Is this scarlet?' so as to call to the memory of everyone the Divine ordinance. Then tying them together with the scarlet wool, he threw the bundle upon the burning heifer. The burnt remains were beaten into ashes by sticks or stone mallets and passed through coarse sieves; then divided into three parts -- one of which was kept in the Temple-terrace (the *Chel*), the other on the Mount of Olives, and the third distributed among the priesthood throughout the land" (*ibid.*, 283-284).

The cedarwood has a sweet fragrance, depicting the sweetness of the aroma of the sacrifice of the Messiah who died for us; the hyssop depicts the astringent cleansing and purification of His sacrifice, removing all sin. "Purge me with hyssop," David prayed, "and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psa.51:7). The "scarlet" depicts the red blood, the source of life. The life of flesh is the blood (Gen.9:4). God says: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood . . . it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Lev.17:11).

The blood of the Messiah, poured out for us, atones for our lives. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom.5:8-9). God says: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa.1:18). "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (v.19-20).

According to the history of the Jewish people, Edersheim tells us, "altogether, from the time of Moses to the final destruction of the Temple, only seven, or else nine, such red heifers had been offered: the first by Moses, the second by Ezra, and the other five, or else seven, between the time of Ezra and that of the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans. We only add that

the cost of this sacrifice, which was always great, since a pure red heifer was very rare, was defrayed from the Temple treasury" (p.285).

When we look carefully at the mysterious sacrifice of the "red heifer," it becomes obvious that it is a remarkable portrayal of the only true "sin-offering" of all time, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died for us on the Mount of Olives, in full view of the assembled Jewish leadership, almost 2,000 years ago. It is a stunning *type* of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

### *An Awesome, Sweeping Prophecy*

The first sacrifice of a heifer in Israel was performed about some 430 years before the time of the Exodus, when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. We read in the book of Genesis, that God said to Abraham, "Take me a *heifer of three years old*, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds he divided not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

'And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an *horror of great darkness* fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a *stranger in a land that is not theirs*, and shall serve them; and they shall *afflict them* four hundred years. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I *judge*: and *afterward shall they come out with great substance*. . . . And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (Gen.15:7-17).

This was a great panoramic prophecy for the future of Israel! It spoke of a coming time of captivity and slavery of Abraham's descendants. This is why a "great horror" fell upon Abraham. This prophecy was initially fulfilled in the slavery of the Israelites under the ancient Egyptians. But Biblical prophecy is often DUAL in nature! That ancient fulfillment was a TYPE of a coming, future, end-time captivity and slavery of God's people, modern Israel -- and their end-time, end-of-the-age RESCUE from that captivity by a prophet greater than Moses -- the MESSIAH! The message of the prophets of ancient Israel repeat this refrain, time and time again, spelling out the coming deliverance of God's end-time people from their end-time slavery and captivity among the nations of modern "Babylon."

Isaiah tells us: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again THE *SECOND TIME* to *recover the REMNANT of his people*, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and *from the islands of the sea*. And he shall set up an ENSIGN for the nations, and shall *assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth*" (see Isa.11:10-12).

We also read in Isaiah's prophecy of the end times, the day of the dawning of the Messianic Age, "I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory. And I will set a SIGN among them, and I will send those that ESCAPE of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have

not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory: and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall BRING ALL YOUR BRETHREN for an offering unto the LORD *out of all nations* upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD . . ." (Isa.66:18-20).

Jeremiah also speaks of this incredible day that is coming soon. He writes: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will *break his yoke from off thy neck*, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore, fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the *land of their captivity*; and Jacob shall RETURN, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid" (Jer.30:7-10).

Jeremiah continues, in the next chapter: "Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it *in the isles afar off*, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath REDEEMED Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD . . . and their soul shall be as a watered garden, and they shall not sorrow any more at all" (Jer. 31:10-12).

The sacrifices that Abraham performed -- the heifer, she goat, ram, turtledove and pigeon -- all are a TYPE of the Messiah. Like these sacrifices of old, Messiah shed His blood for our sins, to redeem us to God, and reconcile us to the Most High. Jesus Christ -- Yeshua the Messiah -- is the true fulfillment of the red heifer slain outside the camp (Heb.13:11-13). He is the fulfillment of the Passover lamb (I Cor.5:7) and the lambs and goats that were slain at the altar (Heb.10:4-14). He is the One represented by the "ram" which was slain instead of Isaac (Gen.22:8-13). *Only through Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, can any be saved!* (Acts 4:12).

The newly-born red heifer, "Melody" -- if she is an authentic red heifer -- also represents a "type" of the Messiah. She is indeed a SIGN that we are living in the days shortly before the coming of the MESSIAH! She is an end-time "SIGN" or HARBINGER of the coming of the ANOINTED ONE of God! He came once, almost 2,000 years ago, as a sacrifice for our sins. He will soon come again to execute JUDGMENT in the earth!