

Purification in an African context from a Missio Dei perspective: Empowering pastors of African Independent Churches in Leandra to interpret the cleansing rituals of Numbers 19 from a Christ centred redemptive perspective: a case study

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PREFACE

This mini-dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts (Missiology) at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. It contains work done from 3 April 2011 to September 2015.

My supervisors on this project have been Prof Dr Flip Buys and Prof Dr Paul Kruger who assisted me in this study.

The work of this project is based on research work done by me. I have tried my best to provide systematic work and references to these sources.

In January 2011 Prof Dr Flip Buys introduced me to the book entitled, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A contemporary hermeneutical method*, by Sidney Greidanus.

This came as a motivation to me to empower pastors of African Independent Churches in Leandra to interpret the cleansing rituals of Numbers 19 from a Christ-centred focus in an African context and within a *missio-Dei* perspective. This also launched my Master's studies on 3 April 2011.

The writing of this mini-dissertation was not an easy task. I encountered challenges and difficulties. God used Prof Flip Buys to encourage me to persevere throughout the process.

On the other hand, this project was a rich blessing to me for I have learnt considerably while I was conducting this study.

Nicholas Nyawuza

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ABSTRACT

This research examines and evaluates the way African Independent Churches use Numbers 19 when cleansing rituals are performed in the Leandra District in South Africa.

Through qualitative empirical research the importance and understanding of these rituals among leaders and members of these churches are investigated.

Their use of Numbers 19 in the Bible, as a key biblical text when they perform cleansing rituals, is evaluated.

By considering valid Hermeneutical, Homiletical and contextualization principles, a Christ-centred redemptive way of interpreting and preaching and teaching Numbers 19 in a contextualized way is offered to enrich the lives of AIC members and to mobilize them as a significant missional force in the midst of fear and grief in struggling communities.

Key Terms:

Cleansing, Purification, Rituals, Redemption, Pentateuch, Book of Numbers, African Initiated Churches or African Independent Churches, African Traditional Religion, Leandra, sangomas, witchdoctor, hlambulula, ukubuyisa.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Introduction

Throughout times, cleansing rituals formed an essential part of traditional African culture. These rituals are still practised widely by adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATR), as well as among the members of a wide variety of African Independent Churches (AICs) in South Africa. The rituals are perceived as a vital means of processing grief, experiencing protection from evil and assuring liberation from fear of evil spirits that caused death.

Most of the AICs use Numbers 19 in the Old Testament as a key biblical text in their cleansing rituals. Some members literally slaughter animals and sprinkle water mixed with blood or ashes on congregants when these rituals are performed. Such rituals form part of worship services in church buildings or of mourning services at private homes during funerals. The question is whether those who practise these rituals interpret and use Numbers 19 in a valid way.

This research investigated the extent to which the worldview of ATR is clouding the reading and understanding (i.e. the hermeneutics) and application (homiletics) of the preachers within the AICs in their usage of this passage when performing purification rituals.

The research also considered the possibility of assisting these pastors from an AIC background to read and interpret this passage from a redemptive historical and Biblical theological perspective, in order to enrich their lives and ministries by developing a more consistently Christ-centred approach in their sermons.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 The importance of cleansing rituals in African culture

Cleansing or purification rituals are still common practices among Africans in Africa and South Africa. Among Africans, as Awolalu (1976:284) notes, “purification is a positive approach to the cleaning and removal of sin and pollution”. In a PhD research project

from a psychological point of view on this phenomenon, Dr Tiny Setsiba (2012) also revealed how widespread these rituals are practised in townships across South Africa.

According to traditional African beliefs, all who have had contact with the dead are regarded as unclean. Therefore all those who were present at the death of a family member or community member, have to undergo cleansing rituals. Such rituals are normally conducted by a diviner or a witchdoctor; or in case of a Christian group, by a bishop or another church leader (Dladla, D. 2011a).

When a family member has died, the family of the deceased is regarded as contaminated or polluted due to the contact with the dead. Community members participate in the ceremonies that aim to remove contaminated spirits from the mourners in order for them to be reunited with society (Setsiba, 2012:20; Ngubane, 1977:45; Ngubane 2004:174). The family is regarded immediately as “polluted” (*banesinyama* in Zulu or *sefifi* in Setswana), which implies that a negative shadow is hanging over them. This also means that the family at that stage is thrown into a state of disequilibrium (Hutchings, 2007:196).

In African culture it is believed that death is always caused by an evil agent. This may be a spirit, witchdoctor or an ordinary person. For example, even if it is known that a wild animal or poisonous snake is responsible for a man's death, the close relatives would not accept this explanation as final. They would seek out the perpetrator or the specific spirit responsible for sending the snake. They would pose the question: Why did it come near the relative? To discover the “truth” in this matter, the relatives would seek the services of a diviner or witch doctor, and would always find “the answer” (Nyirongo, 1997:80). In this context it is believed that the diviner or witch doctor must perform a purification ritual to ward off the evil spirits that have brought the evil (usually called “bad luck”) to the family. The diviner then call on the ancestral spirits to return (in Zulu called: *ukubuyisa*) to protect the family (Selepe & Edwards, 2008).

Cleansing rituals in African societies are also seen as a vehicle to facilitate an experience of their community's orientation. As such it is an expression of *Ubuntu*. Therefore a cleansing ritual usually demands that various family members, extended family and tribal members participate, apart from the individuals on whose behalf the rituals are performed (Thorpe, 1991:120-121). The sense of community and humane existence are highly cherished values of traditional African life. For traditional Africans,

the community in essence is considered sacred, rather than secular, and surrounded by several religious forms and symbols.

Rituals help to structure and thereby impart meaning to human life. Individuals feel the need for such structure to prevent their lives from falling apart and becoming aimless. Cleansing rituals are experienced as a necessary method to process grief (Thorpe, 1991:121).

In South Africa even political leaders believe that cleansing rituals may unleash exceptional powers to solve disasters where many people have died, and bring reconciliation between feuding parties. In this light the South African president, Jacob Zuma, called for a cleansing ceremony to restore what he termed the moral values of the nation (Sapa, 2012a). Zuma asserted that such a ritual would be of great importance in light of incidents such as the following: the Marikana tragedy, where more than 30 striking mineworkers died in violent clashes with the police; the rape of elderly women that had taken place in KwaZulu Natal; and political assassinations. Zuma stressed that people who were not cleansed ritually, harboured grudges. According to the report, Zuma stated that he would call on Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu, of the Anglican Church, to help lead a national cleansing ceremony.

President Zuma's call for a national cleansing ceremony immediately received support from the South African National Civic Organisation. Its spokesperson Dumisani Mthlane pointed out that such ceremonies should also include cleansing of what he termed "roads of death". He maintained that people needed to go back to their roots. "There are ways – we believe – in African, traditional and cultural ways used by our forefathers to deal with tragic events such as road accidents, unfamiliar patterns of behaviour, etc." (Sapa, 2012b). Mthlane continued by emphasising that cleansings rituals needed to be performed "by those entrusted with powers to communicate with the spirits to contain bad luck or [the] reoccurrence of tragic events". He proposed a ritual of *ukuvala umkhokha*, whereby bad incidents are prevented from reoccurring, should be carried out

Such a need for purification rituals is not only expressed by non-Christian people. Such rituals are also practised widely among people who confess to be Christians, and particularly by almost all the members of the AICs (Dladla, D. 2011b). Kgomo (2011) observes that seemingly those members who practise African Traditional Religion

(ATR) and confessing Christians who are leaders and members of AICs, find common ground in practicing purification rituals. This common ground has also been revealed in the studies of Hutchings (2007:199) and Ngubane (2004:188). The adherents to the AICs practise cleansing ceremonies because they believe and claim that this is a confirmed everlasting biblical instruction. According to them they perform cleansing or purification rituals because they believe this is commanded in Numbers 19:1-22 and other passages in the Old Testament (Khumalo, D. 2011a).

If the correct funeral and mourning rites are not observed, adherents of ATR and members of AICs believe that the deceased may return to trouble the living relatives or withhold protection from evil. Usually an animal is slaughtered in a ritual and the blood sprinkled on the mourners, especially the extended family. In addition, the meat serves the practical purpose of providing food for the many guests that usually attend funerals.

1.2.2 Common place of cleansing rituals in the Leandra area

This researcher has been doing evangelism and church planting for more than 10 years in the Leandra area. In this district within South Africa, the performance of cleansing rituals is such a common practice that even road-safety campaigns are making use of such rituals to improve safety on the country's roads: "Cleansing rituals are also performed at places where disasters occurred and several people have died" (Sibanyoni, 2011a).

On the road from the town Leandra, passing the Lebohang township to Standerton, numerous people have died due to car accidents. It is considered that the most dangerous spot on this road is in the vicinity of the old Eskom building between Highland and the RDP sections. Many people have lost their lives at this spot. Community leaders and traffic authorities, therefore, decided to conduct a service on this area, to appease the spirits of the dead. The service included the consultation of the dead, praying to the dead and spilling *UMqombothi* (Traditional African beer) on the road (Sibanyoni, 2011b).

Many people who live in fear of witchcraft practices, also believe that cleansing rituals can break the bondage of witchcraft spells and curses that have been placed on them (Khashane, 2006:46) and have caused the death of a loved one or a member of the family. At a recent youth conference in Zamdela (held on 18-20 June 2005) the question was asked how it could be guaranteed that no bad consequences would befall a

Christian who does not follow specific cultural demands – including *hlambulula* (cleansing) rituals. If the family members of a deceased person are not purified after a time, it is believed that they will be beset by bad luck in life. Despite the fact that these people are confessing Christians, they still hold deep fear of the ancestors, even greater than their fear of God to whom they belong. They do not have a problem following Christ as long as this does not interfere with the relationship they have with the ancestors.

In qualitative empirical research it has been revealed that several members and their families as well as extended families, who lost a relative or a member of the family, expressed the opinion that they perform purification or cleansing rituals as part of processing their mourning over the deceased. Within six or twelve months after the funeral, a pastor of an AIC would lead the cleansing service. In this case the ritual would include Scripture readings from the Old Testament (mostly from the Pentateuch and the majority of the time from chapter 19 of the Book of Numbers), the sprinkling of water, and the slaughtering of an animal. This is called *Ukuhlambulula* “Cleansing” or “Service of cleansing”.

1.2.3 A valid Christian interpretation of the cleansing rituals in the Book of Numbers

According to the Pentateuch cleansing rituals were an important part of worship rituals among the people of Israel. Rules prescribing ritual cleanness as opposed to uncleanness formed an essential part of the basic experiences of life: birth, death, sex, health, and food (Espinoza, 2015: 70).

At a first reading, the doctrine of uncleanness taught in the Book of Numbers seems to be similar to notions of physical and moral impurity in other religions. Douglas (2001:20) contends that, if considered more closely in a comparative framework, the biblical idea of impurity is unusual. For a coherent anthropological interpretation, a new reading has to be developed. The Book of Numbers is composed on the basis of an archaic literary form. Twelve alternating sections of law and narrative run parallel across the Book as a whole.

The laws on holiness fall along the fault-line of abnormality due to the fall, i.e. the curse. Mary Douglas’ socio-anthropological analysis emphasises that the law on uncleanness

from contact with the dead, signals an unnatural condition – hence the accursedness – of dead things; the most accursed dead thing being a dead person. Death thus held sociological implications for the community. According to Numbers 19 in the Old Testament the Israelites were regarded ceremonially unclean whenever they:

- Touched a dead body (Nm 19:11).
- Touched the body of someone who had been slain with a sword (Nm 19:16).
- Touched the body of someone who had died a natural death (Nm 19:16).
- Touched a grave (Nm 19:16).
- Gathered up the ashes of a heifer (Nm 19:9-10).
- Had infectious diseases (Lv 13:1 ff).

Such people had to stay ceremonially unclean for a certain period. For example, in the case of touching a dead body, they had to be regarded as ceremonially unclean for all of seven days (Nm 19:11). Therefore those people who were ceremonially unclean had to follow certain rituals in order to become ceremonially clean again. They had to perform cleansing rituals, or it had to be performed on them. These rituals included the washing of clothes and bathing with water (Lv 14:8; Nm 19:7-8), the sprinkling of water (Nm 19:13, 18), shaving of the beard and the slaughtering of animals (Lv 14:1ff).

1.2.4 A valid hermeneutical method for contextualisation

The present study is primarily a missiological study and therefore its point of departure is the consensus reached in the Willowbank Report,¹ an international report of a consultation organised by the Lausanne Movement. The gist of the report states that “the process of communicating the Gospel cannot be isolated from the human culture from which it comes, or from that in which it is to be proclaimed.” The report concludes: “It is essential, therefore, that all churches contextualise the gospel in order to share it effectively in their own culture” (Lausanne Occasional Paper 2, 1978: 1, 23).

¹ The Willowbank Report is one of the occasional papers prepared by leading Evangelicals at a consultation organised by the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation. It was held at Willowbank, Bermuda in 1978, and dealt with the crucially important subject of Gospel and culture. The report is regarded as a classical statement on this subject from an Evangelical perspective.

As Pratt (2013) has pointed out in at a national conference of The Gospel Coalition that, every reader, interpreter and missionary intuitively contextualize the ministry of the Gospel in the context in which he/she is ministering. The question is thus not whether contextualisation as such is done, but whether it is done in a valid way. The aim is to convey the core of the Gospel in a way that enables the messenger to connect with his/her audience in the context of their worldview and culture most effectively with the intention of enriching their lives are confronting them with the claims of the Gospel.

When evaluating the validity of the AICs' contextualisation in their use of Numbers 19, the basic question is posed: What does God reveal about himself and a holy lifestyle among his people in this passage to contemporary Christians in Africa? In other words, is the continued practice of cleansing rituals in African communities a matter of so-called "adiaphora" – matters that are "indifferent", neither sin nor duty? Phillip Melancthon followed this track in the Lutheran adiaphora controversies over Roman Catholic rituals imposed by the Emperor on Protestant churches in the times of the Reformation. (Fahlbusch, & Bromiley, 1999-2003:33).

On the other hand: Does the reading of Numbers 19 indeed applies with its declaration that "this is a lasting ordinance", and those who refuse it "must be cut off from the community because they have defiled the sanctuary of the Lord" (Nm 19:21a, 19:20)? This ceremony thus includes the dire warning in Numbers 19 about its necessity (under the Old Covenant). If this is interpreted incorrectly it may obscure the redemptive freedom that Christian brothers and sisters in the AICs can truly possess in Jesus.

Nevertheless, there are benefits in reading Numbers 19 through African eyes placed within the perspective of the grand narrative of the Bible (Wright, 2006:12-20). Such a reading may add rich perspectives to the understanding of God's grace and holiness and its implications in the real-life struggles of God's people in Africa. For such a reading an applicable method is needed. When a redemptive historical and biblical theological approach in hermeneutics and homiletics is applied, the interpreter is seeking to understand the structure of the biblical revelation, which enables him/her to draw correct connections between the text and the contemporary hearer in a consistently Christ-centred approach (Greidanus, 1999:20; Clowney, 2003:12; Goldsworthy, 2000:30).

The focus is to assist African Christians in gaining a valid hermeneutical, and homiletically contextualised understanding by applying the ceremonial cleansing laws of Numbers 19. This insight will not only enrich the lives of African Christians, but may prove to be a helpful way of equipping and inspire them to function as a significant part of God's mission (the *missio Dei*) in helping to usher in the kingdom of God (Wright, 2006:20). Missiologists are also of the opinion that, when Christians radiate the fact that they have become a community embodying the new life of God's kingdom in the midst of its particular culture, they gain missional impact in those communities (Goheen, 2011:112). In the new Testament Paul also stresses that Christian believers, living out their belief in the assurance of God's great eschatological future with the return of Christ, should be different from unbelievers (καθώς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ), who have no hope when they process their grief over loved ones who have passed (1 Thes 4:13).

However, contextualisation in the reading of Pentateuch passages without taking the context of the grand biblical narrative into consideration, may lead to forms of animistic syncretism. As a result this may cloud people's understanding of core aspects of the Gospel. These reading thus can become a stumbling block for Christians who seek comfort in Christ and wish to be part of the mission of God, even at funerals and in the processing of their grief.

For a valid, contextualised Christian interpretation and application of these ceremonial laws within an African context, it is of utmost importance to read the Pentateuch and particularly the practice of purification rituals in the context of the grand narrative of the Bible. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider how the shadow of Christ should be discovered in the law of Moses (Poythress, 1995).

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 General formulation

When confessing Christians perform cleansing or purification rituals that clearly come from and reflect the practises of African Traditional Religion, the ritual itself may become a stumbling block in finding the joy of assurance of full and total purification in Christ, relief from all fear of evil and witchcraft and a joyful assurance of the hope of eternal life.

The crucial question is: *What is a valid Christian interpretation of Numbers 19 with regard to ceremonial purity that is imposed after the death of a relative, or a member of*

one's extended family, or even a close friend in an African context? How may such a valid interpretation help members of the Christian community to apply core aspects of the Christian Gospel more effectively when processing grief, and to be relieved from fear and sorrow?

1.3.2 Key research question

The key research question can be stated as follows:

How can pastors of the African Independent Churches in the Leandra area be served to discover the joy of a Trinitarian, Christ-centred redemptive interpretation of the cleansing rituals prescribed to the people of Israel in Numbers 19, when the passage is interpreted within the larger context of the Book and the grand narrative of the whole Bible; then to preach sermons that may facilitate liberation from fear, shame and witchcraft and become a launching pad for missions?

From this central research question the following three sub-questions arise that will be dealt with in chapters 2, 3 and 4 respectively:

- How do pastors of AICs apply Numbers 19 in cleansing ceremonies?
- What is a valid Trinitarian Christ-centric way to interpret and preach from Numbers 19?
- How may empowering AIC pastors do not to apply valid interpretation methods in reading and contextualising the cleansing rituals in the Numbers 19, help them and AIC church members to process grief, be relieved from fear and sorrow, and thus become part of the *missio Dei*?

1.4 Motivation

The researcher's main motivation for a study on this topic is to guide pastors in Leandra to draw a valid line to Christ from the Old Testament passages, especially Numbers 19, that are often used in *ukuhlambulula* (cleansing rituals). The intention is that these pastors read and interpret Numbers 19 in a valid way within the context of the Pentateuch and in light of the grand Bible narrative, from a Biblical theological and Redemptive-historical perspective.

Preliminary qualitative empirical research in Leandra indicated that most pastors from AICs still use (or rather misuse) passages from the Pentateuch, especially Numbers 19, as the foundation to perform cleansing rituals after funerals. The researcher aims to empower these pastors to discover and proclaim the true cleansing in Christ alone by applying valid hermeneutical and homiletical guidelines in their ministry and thereby fulfil their ministry from a *mission-Dei* perspective. While originating from the same background and context the researcher furthermore wishes to enrich the lives of communities living in fear and confusion after the loss of their loved ones.

Realising the missiological significance and potential power of the AICs in the Leandra area, it is the researcher's dream and prayer to help unleash the missional potential of these churches to become a more significant part of the *missio Dei*. In addition, by analysing this ministry among pastors of the AICs in the Leandra area as a case study, results may be gathered that have a much wider relevance for other communities in South Africa and Africa.

1.5 Aim and objectives

The main aim for this study can be stated as follows:

To empower the AIC pastors in Leandra with skills to interpret and preach Numbers 19 and thereby take God's mission to the world

From this main aim the following objectives can be drawn for the present study:

- Evaluate the way the pastors of the AICs in the Leandra district interpret Numbers 19 and preach it during cleansing rituals.
- Present a valid hermeneutical approach to understand and interpret the Pentateuch and point out how it should be applied in the reading, interpretation and application of Numbers 19.
- Present a model that empowers AIC pastors to employ interpretation methods that are valid and contextually relevant, in the understanding and application of the cleansing rituals according to Numbers 19, to comfort and equip church members to be a significant part of the *missio Dei*.

1.6 Research methods

- The present research will be undertaken within an Evangelical perspective and context. In this study, the method of interpreting Scripture is associated with the grammatical historical method (cf. De Klerk & Van Rensburg, 2005; Smith, 2008; Vyhmeister, 2008).
- A qualitative research will be undertaken by interviewing ten church leaders to understand their views on using the Book of Numbers when performing cleansing or purification rituals and ceremonies in their churches and ministries.
- A literature study on the meaning of ritual purification will follow an expository approach of Numbers 19. This implies placing the section within the broader context of the Book and the Pentateuch as well as the grand narrative of both Old and New Testament.
- Finally a methodology will be proposed for the training of pastors from AICs to become conversant with valid basic evangelical Christian hermeneutical and homiletical principles. Models will be suggested on the effective use of these principles in ministering to grieving people within their communities, and thereby empower them to be part of the *missio Dei*.

CHAPTER 2: ANALYSING AND EVALUATING THE VIEWS AND SERMONS OF A TEST GROUP OF AIC PASTORS ON THE CLEANSING RITUALS OF THE PENTATEUCH

2.1 Introduction: Method of qualitative research

Qualitative research methods were used (Cilisa & Preece, 2005) for this qualitative research. Ten pastors of the AICs were interviewed. In addition to these ten pastors of the AICs, seven members from other denominations who do not belong to AICs were interviewed as well to tap their knowledge on how the cleansing rituals are performed both in the AICs and the ATR (African Traditional Religion). All of the participants (B. Baloyi, D. Dladla, M. Dladla, P. Dladla, M. Kgomo, D. Khumalo, M. Lepote, B. Magubane, D. Mathebula, J. Mkotong, H. Nkwanyana, S. Nyawuza, M. Radebe, T. Rumo, A. Sibanyoni, R. Sibeko, and L. Sithole) reside in the town of Leandra, Govan Mbeki Municipality, Gert Sibande District. The participants used their own language and then the data obtained were then translated into English for presentation in the study.

A scientific tool as guideline for the interviews was used and applied to collect relevant data on the practice, views and understanding of these pastors of purification rituals.

2.2 Interview questions

The questions and interviews aimed to determine the worldview-issues, of role-players. For the interviews, the following questions were used:

- What is your surname?
- What is the name of your Church?
- How many years have you been a pastor?
- How many regular members are there in your Church?
- How many branches does your church have?
- Does your church practice cleansing or purification rituals?
- When do you usually do it?

- Can you tell me how exactly you actually do it? What rituals and steps does it include?
- Do you slaughter and sacrifice animals like cows or goats or chickens when you do these rituals?
- Do you sprinkle water or blood or a mixture of water and blood or ashes of sacrifices on the people when you perform these rituals?
- Can you tell me more or less what else are you using and what are you preaching, singing and praying when you do these rituals?
- Do the people in your church dance when they do it?
- Do some of your people have night vigils when they do it?
- How did the old people of previous generations perform these rituals?
- What does your church believe/ say about performing cleansing rituals? When it is needed and performed?
- Do they only do it after death has occurred in a family of one of your church members?
- Do they also do it at other times or occasions?
- Do the church members seriously want these rituals?
- Are they willing to spend money and pay for receiving these rituals?
- How much are they usually prepared to pay for such a ceremony to take place?
- How do these rituals relate to African Traditional Religion and culture?
- Do these rituals have an influence on ancestral or other spirits?
- Can these rituals help to bring safety and peace in communities?
- Some political leaders say we need to do these rituals where death has occurred to facilitate peace. What is your opinion about it?

- How do traditional healers like *sangomas* do these rituals?
- Why do Christians want cleaning rituals?
- How does it help them to go through these cleansing or purification rituals?
- Why do you perform these rituals? What is your real purpose with these practices?
- Do you have a Biblical basis for performing these practices in your church? To which biblical passages do you refer when you perform a cleaning or purification rituals?
- How would you relate Numbers 19 to the practice of performing cleansing rituals?
- Have you ever done an in depth study of the book of Hebrews?
- How do you understand the meaning of Numbers 19 and other the passages you have mentioned in the light of the book of Hebrews?

While conducting these interviews, the researcher was warmly welcomed by pastors since they know him in the community. However, he can recall two bishops who nearly refused him the opportunity to speak to them. They seemed afraid to tell him how their church conducts cleansing rituals, but eventually did participate.

2.3 The performing of purification rituals

This section will summarise, the information provided below as it was gathered through the interviews.

2.3.1 When are purification ceremonies practised?

From the responses to the interviews the following instances could be confirmed when purification ceremonies usually takes place.

2.3.1.1 After death has occurred in a family

Rumo (2013a) stated that the AICs have always practised cleansing rituals based on Numbers 19, after a death. The AICs practise the following cleansing rituals after death has occurred:

1. *Ten-days cleansing ritual*

The ten-days cleansing ritual is the first ceremony after the death, and is performed in ten days' time after the funeral. The ceremony is based on verses 11, 12 that read as follows:

Whoever touches the dead body will be unclean for seven days. He must purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third and seventh days, he will not be clean.

This implies: seven days of which one stays unclean (verse 11), thereafter, on the third day, one purifies oneself with water (verse 12). This entails seven days plus the third day, which is calculated as three days, which equals 10 – hence a “ten-days” cleaning ritual.

However, practically speaking this ceremony does not take place on the tenth day as the term suggests. In actual fact, it takes place on the eighth day (Sunday) if the burial was on Saturday of the previous week, or on Sunday if the funeral was on Saturday of the previous week.

Some have chosen to perform this cleansing ritual on the same day after the funeral when they have arrived back home. This is done to release those who work a far distance away. A further reason for performing the cleansing ritual on the same day is because it saves money as there would be no need to buy food for the church people or to travel back the following week. Nevertheless, even if the cleansing is performed on the same day, the family members still have to wait for ten days before they can be regarded ceremonially clean.

2. *Washing at the gate of the house*

After the people have moved on to the graveyard for the burial, those who have remained at home would take a large sink or plastic washing tub and fill it with water (sometimes cuttings of aloe are strewn into the water). This tub is placed at the gate of the house for participants to wash their hands when arriving at the home. The washing of the hands is based on Numbers 19:16, asserting that whoever was in contact with a grave would be considered ceremonially unclean. Therefore, the attendees wash their hands to become ceremonially clean; ward off bad luck beforehand; and remove the

dust of the grave from their hands. This washing takes place before they enter the house.

After the hands were washed at the gate, the AIC pastors with members of their church congregation would call all the family members together. They will go inside the house and enter the room in which the widow is sitting with others, and where the coffin was placed before the funeral. Then the pastor will perform the ten days cleansing service.

While performing the ten days cleansing service at home, the AIC pastors start off the ceremony by reading Numbers 19:11-17. First they read verses 11, 12 to support the number of days that the cleansing ceremony should take place.

Thereafter they read verse 13-16 to point out to their audience who should receive the cleansing ritual. This is followed by the reading of verse 17 to indicate to their audience that a bucket should be used and should be filled with water and ashes, mostly of a coal and wood. Thereafter, the pastor would take a broom and sprinkle water on the family members and children, except on the widow or widower, whose cleansing takes place in one year's time.

The pastor would then lay hands on the family and pray for them. He would close the service with prayer and move on to the tent, where funeral the service was held, to share the funeral meal with others. After the funeral meal everyone leaves and return home, except for the relatives who usually stay until they are sure that everything is in order with the widow and family.

3. *Cleansing ritual for children*

The cleansing ritual for children takes place three months after the death. The family would slaughter a goat for this cleansing ceremony. During this cleansing ceremony the pastor would read from Numbers 19. During the ritual, the blood, bile, *umswane* ("chime") of a goat will be taken and poured into a bucket of water. Thereafter, each child would dip his or her hands and wash his or her face with this water. The pastor would also sprinkle some of the water on the children. After all these ritual actions, the pastor would declare them ceremonially clean.

4. *Cleansing ritual for a widow or a widower*

Another cleansing ritual that is performed after death has occurred in a family is the one for a widow or a widower. Before this ceremony the following practices should take place (as described by the participants):

Sibeko (2013a) point out that, if the husband has passed away, his wife should wear *isizilo* (mourning clothes) for her husband. Normally, the mourning clothes are worn in different colours. The widow would select the colour of her mourning clothes to match the colour of her church uniform. For example, if she normally wears a blue church uniform the mourning clothes will be blue, or black, for that matter. If the widow is a *sangoma* (a traditional healer) she would rarely wear black, because *sangomas* (traditional healers) believe that black is associated with bad luck.

Sibeko (2013b), Nkwanyana (2013a) and Sithole (2013a) assert that, during the mourning period, the widow is expected avoid the following actions:

- She is not allowed to socialise with the members of the community. If she takes a taxi or a bus she would normally sit on the back seat. If someone were to sit next to her, she would not feel comfortable since the mourning clothes are associated with bad luck.
- She is not allowed to visit her neighbours. If she did needs something from them, she should send someone or a child, or else stand at the gate, because she is not allowed to enter the house of her neighbours.
- She is expected not to have sexual intercourse with any man

5. *Cleansing ceremony of a widow or a widower in one year's time*

Sithole (2013b) explains that, at the cleansing ceremony, according to the Swazi culture, a widow is ritually cleansed by taking a bile of the slaughtered animal and mixing it with the blood of a goat or cow. Then the widow's whole body, from the face to the waist, is smeared with bile and blood. The bath is filled with water and then an *ibhodlo* (a kind of tree) handed to the woman who would shake it in the water in front of everyone. If the shaken water makes bubbles and rises, this means the woman did not perform sexual intercourse during the period of mourning. However if the bubbles do not rise, it is considered a sign that she did have sexual intercourse with another man

during this period, which brings disgrace onto the family of the deceased. The family of the widow should then pay a fine of a cow to the family of her deceased husband in order to cleanse herself and her family. Thereafter she should wash herself in the same bath in which the water was shaken. During this ritual, the widow together with her children would wash with the cleansing water that is mixed with blood, bile, and ashes.

In addition to Sibeko's explanation, Nkwanyana (2013b) points out that *isithundu* (a traditional medicine) is also mixed into the cleansing water. After the cleansing ritual, water is poured out, outside the yard. The water should be thrown away from the members of the family because it carries bad luck.

Sithole (2013c) elaborates on the topic: at the cleansing ceremony the mourning clothes should be burnt. If these clothes do not burn, this would mean that the widow was sexually unfaithful during her period of mourning and uncleanness. If the clothes burn easily, this would mean that she was sexually faithful and did not sleep with a man during her period of uncleanness. Reportedly, this type of test is common among members of the Swazi nation.

After the cleansing ceremony, which includes the burning of the mourning clothes, the widow is given new clothes to put on.

6. *Cleansing ceremony by the church according to Numbers 19*

Dladla, D. (2014c) and Rumo (2013b) explain that, after the traditional and cultural cleansing had taken place, the church would carry on the cleansing ceremony according to Numbers 19. This takes place on the Saturday evening before the night vigil commences. The pastor would summon a widow and all the family members to a cleansing ceremony in a room at their home by appealing to Joel 2:16, "*Gather the people, consecrate the assembly bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast, let the bridegroom leave his room.*" The pastor and the church members would sing hymns, pray and read Numbers 19. He would then take a bucket, pour water into it and mix it with the ashes mostly of a coal or wood. Then the pastor would dip a broom inside the mixture and start sprinkling water on those present, the whole house, as well as the dishes, and the yard as a whole.

The pastor would ask for the widow's church uniform and sprinkle water on the uniform. Thereafter he would declare them cleansed. The widow would be told that she is

cleansed as well and is allowed to wear a church uniform, return to the church and participate in all of the church activities. The pastor would then close this cleansing service, and prepare the family and all the church members for the night vigil. During the night-vigil service the gifts would be presented.

2.3.1.2 Ending the period of mourning

According to the ATR, death is regarded as “bad luck”, often caused by witchcraft, a curse or someone that has angered the spirit world, and thus causes uncleanness. In essence, the AIC share this view. If death occurs in a family, it is seen that “bad luck” is hanging over this family and the members are considered to be unclean. Therefore, a purification ceremony is performed for the members of the family with the belief that it will remove the bad luck and uncleanness caused by death in the family.

2.3.1.3 Fear of evil spirits and bad luck

Sibeko (2013c) claimed that if one happens to come across water mixed with blood and gall that has been used in a cleansing ceremony, one must not tread, or jump over the mixture. One should pass it on the other side of the road, or turn back and take another route if this water covers the road. It is believed that if one treads or jumps over it, the same bad luck from which the family have been cleansed, as well as other bad luck will befall one. In this case the bad luck is called *umkhokha* (an evil spirit causing the bad luck). Someone who has been in touch with or influenced by *umkhokha*, and needs to be cleansed from evil spirits and bad luck from the inside, should consult a *sangoma*. To consult a *sangoma* one needs *imvulamlo* (the money paid for consultation). Usually the amount is R100 though it may vary from one *sangoma* to the other for the *sangoma*'s healing medicine, which induces vomiting and washes away the bad luck. It is believed that the *sangoma*'s medicines most often are used to cause vomiting or diarrhoea – and thus cleanse the bad luck.

From the above, one can deduce that this cleansing ceremony does not only takes place after a death has occurred. It also happens when a person suspects bad luck in his or her life. The indications whether someone has experienced bad luck, are when that person encounters all sorts of problems and afflictions. These can include the following: getting unemployed, involved in a vehicle accident, or left or divorced by a spouse to those who are married. Therefore, if any such incidents do take place, the

sufferer would suspect bad luck in his or her life. As a result, such person would consult a *sangoma* for a cleansing ritual. For these cleansing rituals, a family is permitted to consult a *sangoma*. The *sangoma* then uses water that is mixed with the blood of a goat or cow and mix substances of *muti* in the water by which to perform the cleansing rituals. Rumo (2013c) pointed out that the only difference between the cleansing rituals of a bishop and that of a *sangoma* is that a *sangoma* does not use the Bible, while a bishop follows the biblical guidelines (utilising Numbers 19 and other section of the Scriptures).

2.3.1.4 **Keeping members in the church**

Mathebula (2013a) and Rumo (2013d) point out that, if the church refuses to perform the cleansing ceremony for a family, that family would simply leave the specific church and join another church. Therefore, in order to prevent family members from leaving the church, the pastor would ensure to perform the cleansing ceremony even if he does not believe in such rituals anymore.

2.4 **Church activities during and after the cleansing ritual**

2.4.1 **The use of Numbers 19:1-22**

As was explained above, to end the mourning period after death in a family, the AICs perform the cleansing rituals. The pastors of the AICs justify the cleansing ceremony by appealing to Numbers 19, the whole chapter. Verses 10 and 19 provide further justification for repeated cleansing rituals by maintaining, “*This is a lasting ordinance for them*” (NIV). Another translation states it as follows: “You are to observe this rule for all time to come” (TEV).

In light of the above a brief exposition follows on how the pastors apply Numbers 19 in the cleansing ceremony.

The proof about the materials needed for the cleansing ceremony

The pastors recount the verses below, as proof for the actions and materials needed to perform the cleansing rituals.

- They highlight verses 1-3, according to which the heifer was brought to Eleazar the priest to be slaughtered. By reading or applying these verses the pastors would

justify the slaughtering of the cow by claiming, “Do you see? The cow needs to be slaughtered in order to perform the cleansing ritual.”

- In verse 4 they find the proof for the need of sprinkling blood in cleansing rituals.
- Verses 13, 18 and 19 would provide proof for the need of using water in these rituals.
- From verse 9 they would find proof about the ashes that need to be mixed in.
- Verses 6 and 18 provide the proof for using a “hyssop branch” (they use a broom instead).
- In verse 17 the pastors find the proof regarding the “jar” (which they replace with a bucket).

2.5 Purification ceremonies during the official unveiling of tombstones

As explained in one of the headings below, purification is also done during the unveiling of the tombstone to ward off the evils spirits that may be hovering over the grave.

Rumo (2013e) stated that there is a reason behind the building of a tombstone. This is not done for anyone. It is extremely rare to build a tombstone for a person who caused trouble for the family while he or she was still alive. Very seldom families erect a tombstone for a thief, a liar, or a troublemaker both in the family and community. In most cases such tombstones are erected members of that family who are considered important. This usually entails members who were respected, took care of their family or enjoyed sound relationships with the family members. In other words, such a person would not be forgettable, both in the context of the family and the surrounding community.

Baloyi (2013a) explains that the unveiling of the tombstone entails the formal removal of a veil or cloth draped over the tombstone. The unveiling normally takes place in a year’s time after the death has occurred. The family, the bishop, and the members of the congregation would go to the grave of the deceased where this service would be performed.

Rumo (2013f) and Baloyi (2013b) have provided the researcher with insight into the procedure that is often followed during the official unveiling of tombstones. This procedure is expounded in the headings below.

- **The singing of a hymn**

Normally, the following hymn is sung at the grave: "*Ngathi ngisahamba emhlabeni ngahlalelw' ithuna lami la, njengembali eqhakaza namhla ngakusasa isibune nya.*" Translated, "As I was going on the earth, I was waited for by my grave. I was like a flower that blooms today, and tomorrow is no more."

- **The offering of prayer**

After the hymn the bishop would pray words such like these: "*Nkosi sicela ubusise lenkonzo yokuvulwa kwetshe. Amen.*" Translated, "Lord, we ask you to bless the unveiling of the tombstone service. Amen."

- **The reading of the Scripture**

Religious leaders often refer to 2 Samuel 18:18 before all present. According to this passage, Absalom sets up a pillar of remembrance to his own death, seeing that he had no son to do it for him. Normally, the bishop would read any passage in the Bible as long as it refers to a tombstone or something similar such as a monument. Bishops have a range of verses from which to choose. These include: Genesis 35:20 in which Jacob erects a pillar at the grave of his beloved Rachel; Joshua 24:26-27 where Joshua sets up a large stone as a witness against Israel should they forsake their pledge to remove the gods their ancestors served, and only worship the Lord.

- **Sermon**

After reading one of the passages mentioned above, the bishop would present a brief sermon. If he reads from Genesis 35:20, for instance, the content of the sermon would be as follows: "As Jacob built a tombstone for Rachel, so this family has built the tombstone for X, and today they unveil it. We do not worship the dead but we remember them so that if anyone who was born after the death of that person asks where is your father or mother, or any member of the family, you can refer them to that tombstone, 'That is my father, that is my mother who is lying there.'"

- **The unveiling of the tombstone**

The bishop would then call on one of the family members to unveil the tombstone. He would prompt the action by words such as: “*Seningayisusa indwangu manje.*” Translated, “You may now remove the cloth.”

- **The reading of the headstone inscription**

Thereafter the bishop will read headstone inscription. An example of such an inscription reads: “*U X wazalwangomhlaka 02 November 1959, washona ngomhlaka 01 February 2012. Lalangoxolo,*” Translated, “X was born on 02 November, and died on 01 February 2012. Rest in peace.”

- **Offering prayer over water**

The bishop would then pray over the water, which would be transformed into “holy water”.

- **The sprinkling of water over the tombstone**

The pastor or bishop would then sprinkle the “sacred” water over the tombstone immediately after the prayer over the tombstone. The sprinkling is done to ward off *ukungcola* (uncleanness), *imimoya emibi* (the evil spirits), *amashwa* (bad luck) that may be hovering in the graveyard and over the grave.

- **Offering the closing prayer**

After the ceremony, the bishop would sit down and present the closing prayer: “Lord we thank you for helping us to complete this service. Amen.” Thereafter, the members of the church and the community would go return with a number of members from the deceased family. The rest of the family members would be left behind to take part in further activities.

- **Activities after the closing prayer:**

After the closing prayer, the family members who have remained take part in a number of activities that will be discussed briefly below.

- **The calling of the family**

Before or after the closing prayer, the family are called to come forward and kneel before the tombstone. They pick up some of the white stones, spit their saliva on the white stones and place these on the tombstone.

- **The burning of the tombstone-covering cloth**

The burning of the cloth covering the tombstone takes place when almost all the actions are completed. The cloth is burnt by the members of the family. This is done to ward off bad luck.

2.6 Other times or occasions when purification rituals are performed

Nyawuza (2013) confirmed that some AICs, such as the ZCC, perform cleansing by water almost daily when they attend church services. The bishop remains behind with a bucket of cleansing water at the gate of the church site, to minister those who are unclean before they converge with the other members in the church. This type of cleansing is performed daily to all members who attend the service. The reason is that they are considered to have exposed themselves to all types of temptation each day they sit at home or go on street, and then become defiled.

Besides undergoing daily cleansing ceremonies, some members choose to perform what can be termed a “spontaneous” cleansing ceremony. Such a cleansing ceremony can take place at any time when one suspects bad luck caused by evil spirits in his or her life. Nkwanyana (2013c) confirmed that, in such a case, a *sangoma* would be consulted to conduct a cleansing ritual. As was indicated above, a *sangoma* uses water mixed with blood and forms of *muti*, a herbal medicine believed to have medicinal and magical powers, to cleanse people ceremonially from suspected evil.

Nkwanyana (2013d) continued by stating that if the person who needs cleansing wants to consult a prophet, he or she follows that option. A prophet uses water mixed with ashes that they call *isiwasho*, as means to cleanse people ceremonially. On the other hand, if the individual concerned wishes to consult a bishop, he or she follows that option for cleansing. As indicated above, the bishop follows the biblical guideline, particularly Numbers 19 for cleansing rituals. In a normal case, the bishop pours water

into a bucket and mixes it with ashes, after which the cleansing rituals commence (Nkwanyana, 2013e).

2.6.1 When church members seriously request these rituals

Dladla, D. (2014d) confirmed that in most cases it is the church members that request these cleansing rituals. When they wish to have cleansing rituals, they tell and ask their bishops to conduct these cleansing ceremonies for them.

2.6.2 Ways it is requested

Dladla, D. (2014e) mentioned that people want these cleansing ceremonies to be performed as they request it. There are different ways in which these cleansing rituals are requested, mostly based on whether a person belongs to AICs or ATR.

2.6.2.1 Those who belong to AICs

Those who belong to AICs normally request these rituals after the death has occurred. They then request the ceremonies for a cleansing purpose. They also wish these cleansing rituals to be performed by their church leaders – bishops and archbishops.

Mathebula (2013b) stated that when the time has come for the family to be cleansed from ceremonial impurity, they ask the bishop to perform a cleansing purification service. If the family does not belong to any church, they ask and hire any bishop who would be willing or able to do it. After the ceremony he would be paid for his service. There is no specific set price for such remuneration; it depends on the sum of money the bishop charges, and the amount the family is willing to pay.

2.6.2.2 Those who belong to the ATR

Dladla, D. (2014f) mentioned that members who belong to ATR would wish to have cleansing rituals performed whenever they feel afraid of bad luck. They do it to ward off the evil spirits. In this case a *sangoma* is consulted to determine the cause of the bad luck haunting them. The *sangoma* prescribes the cleansing method, which in most cases includes the washing of the body with water mixed with *muti*, ashes, and/or the blood of an animal – a chicken, goat or even a cow. This method is followed to ward off bad luck and to appease the ancestral spirits if they are the ones who caused the bad luck of malady.

2.7 Willingness to spend money and pay for rituals

Sibeko (2013d) confirmed that people who regard cleansing rituals as important do not mind to spend a significant amount of their money on what it takes to receive these cleansing rituals. They are prepared to spend even their last cent to ensure that the ritual is performed properly and will be effective and successful. If they do not have money they just borrow it and in this way often accumulate significant debts. As an example, the researcher met a man in a bank queue and in the ensuing conversation discovered that the man was on his way to borrow R3 000 to cover the cost of a cleansing ritual. This is but one example that shows how serious people are to ensure that the cleansing rituals turn out successful.

2.7.1 Amounts of money usually spent on such rituals

It costs people huge sums of money to perform these cleansing rituals, because almost all the resources needed to make these rituals effective and successful require money. Normally, they need money to cover the costs of the items mentioned below, to ensure effective and successful execution.

2.7.1.1 Money spent on food

The food for these rituals includes one or two chickens that is slaughtered and used to perform the rituals, and thereafter eaten by the family members. Sithole (2013d) confirmed that a goat, which usually costs approximately R1 200, is also slaughtered for typical rituals.

Sithole (2013e) and Radebe (2013) explained that if the deceased is a father or mother, a cow is normally slaughtered, which might cost between R5 000-R10 000. Moreover, Rumo (2013g) confirmed that if a father has passed away, a cow would be slaughtered for he is the head of the house. The price of a cow is often determined by the size and the weight of a cow. The more weight, or the bigger the size, the higher the price. The hide of a cow is usually buried together with the dead. Then it would not be sold to the skin tanners for jackets and production of shoes. Sometimes a goat is slaughtered in the place of a cow. A goat costs from R1 500 and R2 000.

More money is also spent on other elements: vegetables, rice, tin stuff, sugar, milk, dish washing soap, or the brewing of *Umqombothi* (African Traditional beer). During rituals a

part of the homemade beer and some snuff is sometimes poured onto the ground for the *abaphansi* (ancestral spirits).

2.7.1.2 Money spent on gifts or presents

Dladla, P (2013a) confirmed that, in addition to the money spent on buying and slaughtering animals as well as on groceries, the members of the family buy various other gifts. These include: blankets, face clothes, shirts, body-washing and dish-washing baskets. These gifts are for one another, including the extended family and neighbours who assisted the family members during the period of mourning. The receivers of gifts also include the bishop of the church as the one especially responsible for comforting the bereaved and for leading the rituals.

Likewise, church members do the same for the family. They provide the family with a few blankets, shirts, T-shirts, socks, face cloths, et cetera. Each blanket costs approximately R150. If ten people are to receive blankets, this means the church would spend approximately R1 500 to provide each person with a blanket.

The gifts mentioned above, may make up a total of roundabout R9 000, depending on the quality and prices of the gifts they wish to buy (Price, 2013).

2.7.1.3 Money spent on hiring a tent and chairs

Mkhatshwa (2013) confirmed that if the family wishes to hire a tent together with chairs the costs is approximately R700 with R5 per chair.

2.7.1.4 Money spent on transport

Khumalo, G (2013a) reported that hiring transport to town in order to buy the groceries, costs approximately R100. Khumalo, G (2013b) also confirmed that to hire transport is more expensive than to have one's own means.

2.8 Purpose of purification rituals

2.8.1 Helping to process grief and sorrow

Rumo (2013h) and Sibeko (2013e) point out that, as it is generally true, death causes grief and sadness. To express grief and sorrow, according to ATR and AICs, a widow wears mourning clothes and not allowed to visit her neighbours. When she looks at

herself wearing mourning clothes, she would be reminded of her husband or any family member who passed on and she would be sad and feel deep sorrow. That applies to children and relatives as well. Cleansing ceremony is what needs to be done to help process grief and sorrow. For it is after the performance of cleansing ritual that family members would be ensured that the dead is now rested in peace. That belief would release their soul and help them close the old chapter and focus on new things

2.8.2 Warding off evil spirits or bad luck

Radebe (2013a) confirmed that they perform cleansing rituals to ward off or prevent evil spirits of bad luck. This belief is widespread among African Traditional Religion and African Independent Churches. They believe that, one does not perform cleansing rituals for your deceased loved ones, they would cause you bad luck or would not prevent evil spirits of attacked you. The bad luck include a wide range of negative consequences such as getting unemployed, losing money, becoming involved in a road accident, suffering injuries at the work place, having bad dreams, being attacked by diseases. The belief is that these and other spirits of bad luck could be prevented by undergoing the process of cleansing rituals.

2.8.3 Helping to bring safety and peace in communities

Lepote (2013) and Mkotong (2013a) point out that some people believe that violence and insecurity may occur because of neglecting cleansing rituals. Such violence and peace could be overcome, however, if the cleansing ritual is performed. This would help restore peace and safety to the community. Radebe (2013b) asserted: "If a cleansing ceremony is not done, that can cause confusion among the members of the family as well as the community."

2.8.4 Political leaders requests these rituals

Political leaders also do request these rituals to facilitate peace in areas where violence has occurred.

A prominent example is where President Jacob Zuma praised the KwaZulu-Natal government for arranging a cleansing ceremony to help reconcile members of the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). "That is good leadership. Ceremonies of this nature are very important. It will help people to reconcile

and move forward with life.” he asserted at the ceremony held at the Vulindlela Sports Ground in Pietermaritzburg. He continued to point out that reconciliation would make it easier for development to take place in the area.

The ceremony was aimed at bringing together groups who were at loggerheads during the political violence in the 1980s and early 1990s. The conflicts mainly raged between members of the ANC and IFP. The latter, however, boycotted the ceremony, claiming it was an electioneering stunt by the ruling party. The Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini, and the KwaZulu-Natal Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, as well as the traditional leaders were present.

People affected by violence said they were happy they had been given an opportunity to reconcile. Nomagugu Zondi stated: “We are happy because there was no cleansing ritual when the conflicts ended. We will now move on with life and there will be no tensions.” She mentioned it was unfortunate that IFP leaders had boycott the ceremony: “They have missed the opportunity. I believe they have made a huge mistake.” Zondi continued by stressing she did not think the function was aimed at electioneering.

Mkhize motivated his stance: “Traditional leaders and regiments under uMgungundlovu district municipality approached the provincial government with the request to be assisted towards performing this ceremony. The ‘regiments’ were involved in a series of fights in the past which had claimed many lives. The provincial government believed it was important to reconcile. Although the violence ended ... some people are still scared to meet other people because of what they did to them. This is because there has never been reconciliation.”

In praising the provincial government for promoting peace and reconciliation, Zwelithini stated, “I like leaders who preach peace and reconciliation. I wouldn't have been here if I did not believe in the importance of reconciliation.” It is said that ten cows were slaughtered as part of cleansing ritual which was conducted by the “Nazareth Baptist Church, popularly known as the Shembe Church”(Sapa, 2010a).

2.9 Relation of purification rituals to African Traditional Religion and culture

Dladla, P. (2013b) points out that the cleansing ceremony of Numbers 19 is not practised only by members of the AIC. These practices are also performed by those members rooted in the ATR. This takes place if a widow or widower, or children, for example, are regarded unclean because of death in a family. A *sangoma* is usually

called to perform the cleansing ceremony. Unlike the case with the AICs, the ATR's cleansing ceremony is performed by a *sangoma*, who usually suggests the slaughtering of a chicken, a goat, or a cow. The blood of these animals is mixed with *muti*. Water is used to help mix the blood and medicine together. When the cleansing water is ready for use, it is poured into a bucket. All the family members who are considered unclean due to the death, will then be washed, or wash themselves with cleansing water. After washing with the cleansing water, those who were unclean are considered to be cleansed.

After this culturally cleansing ceremony, the church starts off with a service in which the cleansing process is completed. The participants enter the house, sing a number of hymns and pray. Thereafter they read passages such as Joel 2:16, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet."

2.10 Benefits of undergoing cleansing or purification rituals

There are certain clear benefits for people to take part in such cleansing or purification rituals, as is indicated below.

Avoiding grudges: President Jacob Zuma stated in a speech, "People who were not cleansed harboured grudges" (Sapa, 2012c)

Restoring moral values: It was reported that President Zuma wanted to hold a national cleansing ceremony to restore moral values in the country (Sapa, 2012d).

Cessation of tension among people: Speaking at cleansing ritual between the ANC and IFP, at Vulindlela sports ground, Pietermaritzburg, Nomagugu Zondi claimed "We are happy because there was no cleansing ritual when the conflicts ended. We will now move on with life and there will be no tensions" (Sapa, 2010b).

Ceremonially cleansed: Dladla, P. (2013c) claimed that if one does not undergo the cleansing rituals he or she will remain unclean. Therefore, to be cleansed from ceremonial impurity, the perception is that people need to undergo these cleansing rituals.

Freeing people to socialize: Sibeko (2013f) explained that when a widow, for instance, is still under the period of mourning she is not allowed to socialize or visit neighbours. She is obligated to sit on the back seat of public transport (bus or taxi). However, once the cleansing ritual is done, such a widow has been freed to socialize with people and visit neighbours.

The influence on ancestral or other spirits: Magubane (2013a) mentioned that the cleansing ceremony appeases the ancestral spirits and they help to divert bad luck. The rituals also help to bring luck and prosperity.

Financial benefits: Rumo (2013i) pointed out the fact that the family spend a huge amount of money in undergoing a cleansing ceremony. However, they also make more money in return. The reason is that members of the church as well from the community would return the favour by giving more money, blankets, clothes, and furniture. It is possible for these members to give gifts of the value of R30 000 or more. This depends on the attendance to the ritual. The more attendees they have, the more financially viable such an enterprise becomes.

2.11 Ways of performing cleansing rituals

Cleansing rituals usually are performed in two main ways: culturally, or according to the biblical guidelines.

2.11.1 Participants in such ceremonies

When performing cleansing rituals, all those present, the family members, church members, and church leaders, play an important role to stage the ritual.

2.11.2 The order of worship or program for such ceremonies

Rumo (2013j) pointed out that there is no exact standard for the order of worship in cleansing rituals among the AICs. However, it was found that the following elements are practised almost among all members of the AICs:

- lighting candles;
- singing of hymns; there is no specific hymn. They sing any church hymn
- praying over the clothes of the deceased for cleansing;

- reading of Numbers 19, Joel 2:15-17 or John 17:17;
- sprinkling of *isiwasho* (water mixed with ashes) over the family, including the tent itself for cleansing purposes;
- singing hymns; there is no specific hymn. Any hymn is sung
- giving gifts/ presents – reading Job 42:8 beforehand;
- praying on the family members by laying on of hands;
- praying for the gifts/presents;
- serving food;
- night vigils by some.

Dladla, P. (2013d) stated that some people do perform purification rituals as part and parcel of the night vigils. Normally, a night vigil takes place from a Saturday night to Sunday morning.

Radebe (2013) explained that immediately after the cleansing rituals had taken place, the pastor and the whole church would start the night vigil. During the night vigil the service would include the following liturgy:

- **Opening prayer**

The Archbishop or bishop would open the night-vigil service with prayer.

- **The singing of hymns**

Different churches would be given the platform to sing their hymns. There is no specific song. They sing any song

- **The giving of gifts and presents**

To encourage the giving of gifts and presents the pastor would read the Bible from Job 42:11: “All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold

ring”(In this passage Job was comforted and given gifts by his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him for his suffering).

Based on this verse and others related to matter of giving, every church member and individual would be given the platform to come forward and deliver their gift to the members of the family. As was mentioned, such gifts include: money, blankets, furniture and clothes to wear. At this point the family may receive more money, and resources in return.

The giving of gifts would continue until the following day (Sunday) in the morning.

- **Prayer**

The night vigil is normally closed by the word of prayer from the clergy leading the service (pastor, bishop, or archbishop).

- **Serving of food**

After the prayer had taken place, the congregation would be seated. Tea and cakes would be served, after which a meal would follow.

2.11.3 Numbers 19 used in cleansing ceremonies

Dladla, P. (2013e) indicated that Numbers 19 is read mostly when the cleansing service requires or includes water for washing or to sprinkle on the family. The person leading the ceremony takes the water mixed with ashes, called *isiwasho*, then prays over it, and sprinkles the family and the tent with the mixture.

2.11.4 Sprinkling of various mixtures during the rituals

Dladla, P. (2013f), Radebe (2013), and Rumo (2013k) pointed out that before the sprinkling takes place, the church leader, archbishop, bishop, or a pastor, would ask the church to read Numbers 19:17-18 which reads as follows:

For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must all sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death.

After reading these verses the person leading the ritual would emphasise that the ceremony is not man-made, but written in the Word of God. This passage states strongly that if anyone has contact with death, that person is declared unclean. Thus for such a person to be clean, a pastor should pour water into a bucket and also add some ash to the bucket. Thereafter, he should confirm to the family that, according to the passage of Scripture, they are considered ceremonially unclean, because death has occurred in the family. Thus they need to be cleansed from this uncleanness.

When saying this, he would ask his assistants to pour water into a bucket and add ashes. Some also add blood to the water. Then a pastor would take a broom in place of the hyssop branch, dip it into the water, and sprinkle water on a widow and all the family members. He would also sprinkle it in all the rooms inside and outside the house, including the yard. Inside the house the dishes and the uniform of the widow would be sprinkled with water as well. After the sprinkling the clergyman would declare them clean. He would encourage the widow to perform her daily works as normally, including attending church and other activities.

2.11.5 Examples of hymns and prayers used during the practise of these rituals

Baloyi (2013c) mentioned that, when members of the ATR perform a cleansing ceremony, they always sing numerous hymns depending on the time available. The hymns itself not matter, as long as it are church hymns. In some instances, the people present would prefer singing hymns that the deceased enjoyed singing when alive.

There are no established set of prayers followed during the cleansing rituals. Church members and pastors pray as they are led by the spirit. However, if some of their prayers would to be cited, it can be said that these prayers often repeat the words, *Baba sesiyawuqala lomsebenzi wokuhlambulula. Ngakho ke sicela ube nathi usihole kuwo, Amen.* (“Father we are now starting the cleansing service. There be with us and guide us, Amen.”). These prayer words are found in almost every prayer recited at the opening of a cleansing ceremony.

At the end of the cleansing ceremony, words are recited such as: *Baba wethu siyabonga ukuthi usiholile ngempumelelo kulomsebenzi. Siyakucela ukuthi ube nalomndeni uwuhlambulule, Amen.* (“Our Father we thank you that you have led us

successfully to do this work. We pray that you would be with this family and cleanse them, Amen”).

2.11.6 Body movements during such ceremonies

Normally, the cleansing ritual is held in the house in the room in which the coffin was. They move to the tent for night vigil. During the cleansing ritual, the family sits down to receive the rituals. They kneel down when the bishop prays and lay on his hands. On the other hand, the bishop or archbishop remains standing to perform the ceremony. The ordinary church members remain standing with the bishops and sing various hymns. The members practice “wheel dances” (dancing in circles, sometimes to the beat of drums) and clap as they sing (Radebe, 2013c).

2.11.7 Slaughtering of animals before or during or after rituals

Nkwanyana (2013f) explains that, for the cleansing rituals to take place, there has to be an animal (a cow, goat, or chicken) that would be slaughtered before the cleansing ritual commences.

After mentioning that animals need to be slaughtered, the reason could be asked regarding the choice of the animal. Why do participants choose a cow, goat or chicken? Their choice of the animal for slaughtering is according to the financial resources of those partaking in the ritual. The more money they have, the larger the animal for the ritual and vice versa.

Another reason why they choose a particular animal, is because the *sangoma* or *inyanga* instructs them to make the choice. If one of them commands someone to slaughter a chicken, that individual obeys without questioning the instruction. The same applies to the slaughter of a goat, or a cow.

In some instances the choice of an animal is relayed directly from the ancestral spirits that communicate through dreams.

2.11.8 Ways elderly people of previous generations performed the rituals

Nkwanyana (2013g) states that during the previous generation, the family members, especially the elderly people, would go to the graves before the cleansing ceremony could take place. This was done to let the ancestors know that the family would perform

the cleansing ceremony, and request them to keep the peace and hold everything in order during the cleansing ceremony.

Those who were talking to the ancestors were not allowed to talk to anyone on the road until they arrive home. At home they would kneel before a cow that was to be slaughtered and talk to the ancestors about offering of the cow. The cow would then be slaughtered and its blood and bile, used to cleanse the widow and the whole family.

A *sangoma* (a traditional healer) is always involved in the cleansing rituals. This diviner is there to give instructions and to ensure that the cleansing ritual is performed well.

Dladla, M. (2013a) points out that other times cleansing rituals had to be performed by a *sangoma*. He or she would use the *muti* mixed with water to help anyone who suspected bad luck, to vomit. Then other *muti* was used for *ukufutha* (steaming) and they would throw out this *muti* on the crossroads early the following morning while still dark. While throw it, they would say something like: *Hamba mashwa! Hamba moya omubi!* (“Go away bad luck! Go away evil spirit”). Anyone who would pass on that road and happen to cross over the *amanzi okufutha* (steam water) would take bad luck onto him- or herself.

2.11.9 Ways traditional healers perform the rituals

Magubane (2013b) and Rumo (2013l) contend that it is possible to perform a cleansing ritual without the involvement of the church. For example, a widow could be cleansed by taking *inyongo yembuzi* (bile of a goat), mix it with the *igazi lembuzi* (the blood of a goat) and mix this with water in a bucket. The water is then called the water of the cleansing ritual. A widow would take this water and wash herself or be washed by other women in the family. Thereafter, she would be considered as cleansed. In most cases a *sangoma* would be involved, and then her medicine would be added to the water of cleansing.

The cleansing ritual usually takes place at home, but it can also be performed outside the home at a secluded place at evening on a Friday or Saturday early morning. In such a case the widow is accompanied by other women of the family. She would utter words such as, *Ngigeza isinyama nefu lokufelwa. Uma baba wekhaya ubuya ekhaya uze ngokuthula ubheke nabantwana* (“I wash bad luck and the cloud of death. My husband

and the father of my children when you come at home, come with peace and watch our children”). Thereafter, the widow would be given new clothes and her old clothes burnt.

The goat that is slaughtered would be eaten by the family only, seeing that it is meant exclusively for the family. On the next day a cow would be slaughtered and cooked by the family for the church members.

2.12 The understanding of Numbers 19 in cleansing ceremonies

Adherents to the rituals understand Numbers 19 as the Book that gives them permission to practise these cleansing ceremonies. They directly apply Numbers 19 to all the cases where death has occurred.

2.12.1 Numbers 19 related to cleansing or purification rituals

Numbers 19 is always understood to be related to the practice of cleansing rituals. The reason is that all cleansing ceremonies are based on an exposition of this passage. This applies to the following ceremonies: the ten days cleansing, the cleansing for children that takes place approximately three months after the funeral, and the cleansing of the widow.

2.12.2 History of the use of Numbers 19 in such ceremonies

Rumo (2013m), Sibeko (2013g), and Radebe (2013d), and Dladla (2013) pointed out that the AICs and the ATR members throughout have used Numbers 19 as the basis to perform cleansing rituals whenever there was such a need. The cleansing ritual patterns or concepts of Numbers 19 have been used in the following places:

Homes: Whenever death occurs, the homes of the deceased are the places in which the cleansing ceremonies are performed.

Accident spots: The cleansing and the taking of the souls of those died on the roads and other areas.

Violence areas: The cleansing rituals are also performed at areas (or related spots) where violence occurred or people died. Examples include the following:

Ellis Park Stadium

The cleansing ceremony based on Numbers 19 was used at Ellis Park Stadium on 15 April 2001, due to the stampede in which approximately 43 Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates fans died on the scene.

Vulindlela Sports Ground, Pietermaritzburg

Government officials performed a cleansing ceremony for people who died in violence, due to the war between the IFP and the ANC. The ceremony took place at the Vulindlela Sports Ground in Pietermaritzburg on 7 November 2010.

Marikana

The cleansing rituals following the death of 34 mine workers took place at Marikana on 17 June 2013.

2.12.3 Other biblical passages used when cleansing rituals are performed

Passages used in conjunction with Numbers 19 are Joel 2:15, 17:

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

Presenters of these rituals also use John 17:17: "Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth."

Of these two passages mentioned above, Dladla, M. (2013b) and Radebe (2013e) stated that they use Joel 2:15-17 to call the family together in one place for church cleansing after the culturally cleansing rituals have taken place. The latter includes the mixture of the blood, ashes, water and sometimes *muti*, which is performed by a *inyanga* (a traditional healer using medicine made from plants and animal) or *sangoma*. For the church cleansing ritual those who proceed, read John 17:17 and then ceremonially clean the people present by the laying on of hands.

Dladla, M. (2013c) and Radebe (2013f) point out that Job 42:8 is also read during the cleansing ceremony:

Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for

him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

The main reason for reading Job 42:8 is that it refers to the giving of gifts. Therefore, the members of the church are called and motivated to give to the family members of the deceased. The gifts and presents should be given to the members who lost their loved ones, as it was the case with Job after he lost his children (Dladla, M. 2013d; Dladla, P. 2013g; Nkwanyana, 2013h; Radebe, 2013g; Rumo, 2013n).

Rumo (2013o) mentioned that Leviticus 11 and 13 is used for cleansing women at childbirth.

2.12.4 Knowledge of the Book of Hebrews

As practitioners of rituals read Numbers 19 and other laws in the Torah, they show ignorance of the Book of Hebrews. They do not understand that the laws found their fulfilment in Christ as the Book of Hebrews clearly states that all the ceremonial laws were mere shadows pointing to the reality, which is Christ (Hb 8:5; 10:1). They have no valid Christian understanding of the relation between the Old and the New Testament. As a result they keep on practicing ceremonial laws of cleansing and others as prescribed in the Book of Numbers and Leviticus. Should these people have the knowledge, they would cease these practices.

2.13 Evaluation

2.13.1 Knowledge of the place of Numbers 19 in its context and the context of the grand Bible narrative

Bible verses need to be understood within its immediate context as well as the wider context of the chapter, the message of the whole Book, and even within the scope of the Torah, and the Bible as a whole. Clearly the practitioners of the cleansing rituals do not have this knowledge, nor know how to apply it.

There is a lack of understanding how the Book of Numbers relate the other Books in the Pentateuch, as scholars have stated clearly, “Numbers should not be studied independently of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. For example, Exodus 19:1 recounts Israel’s arrival in the wilderness of Sinai in the third month after the Hebrews left the land of Egypt. From the third to the twelfth month they received the Decalogue,

instructions for building the Tabernacle, and directions concerning the many details of the sacrificial system set forth in Leviticus. In Numbers, the people of Israel are taught how to function as a camp. Their religious, civil, and military economies are set in order, in preparation for their journeying, worshiping, and conquering as a nation” (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1990:111).

2.13.2 Application of valid hermeneutical and homiletical guidelines

Throughout the interviews with the bishops as practitioners of cleansing rituals it became clear that they lack insight in basic hermeneutical rules of Bible interpretation. They do not know how to place Numbers 19 within the context of the Book, the Pentateuch, and the whole Bible. This also became evident in their sermons, because they fail to move from the “then situation” to the “now situation” in a valid way. They are uninformed about the prescription and description principles, which help the reader to see whether a passage is a command (prescriptive) or merely makes a statement that does not require an action from people (descriptive). As a result they interpret the Book of Numbers, especially the cleansing rituals, as if all the information is descriptive and should be applied literally by New Testament Christians.

Though, some bishops use John 17:17, they also isolate it from its immediate context and the context of the Gospel of John as whole. In this sense they just use this biblical passage as a tool to complete the cleansing ceremony that took place a few hours before they read this verse.

2.13.3 Offering salvation and comfort in Christ

Many leaders and members of the AICs who practise cleansing and purification rituals would confess that they know Christ brought salvation through his death as is stated in the New Testament. Nevertheless, they do not testify to being assured of their own salvation and are also not certain what the salvation of Christ means. Their lifestyle appears to be driven by fear of evil spirits. Seeing that they do not understand how to interpret the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, their focus is extremely legalistic and their lifestyle is determined by taboos.

2.13.4 Legacies of ancestral worship

Sibeko (2013h) asserted that some of the bad fruit resulting from the worldview and practicing of cleansing rituals are people living in continued poverty and in continuous

fear of the influence of ancestral spirits. They see the images in their dreams of family members who died, and are fearful of death or being bewitched. The interviews also revealed a lack of sound relationships between husbands and wives, seeing that the service of cleansing rituals would often take place without mutual consent.

2.13.5 Exploiting the fears of the people economically

Sibeko (2013i) claimed that the *inyangas* and *sangomas* do benefit financially by performing cleansing rituals. They are consulted when cleansing rituals have to be practised according to cultural traditions. Thus they exercise total authority over the grieving people who are living in fear. In addition, diviners issue the instructions on how the services should be conducted including the kind of animal that needs to be slaughtered.

2.13.6 Producing more poverty

The ancestral worship or purification rituals keep many members trapped in poverty. Numerous families remain poor because they have to spend large amounts that they could use to develop their lives economically. The money is mostly spent on cows or goats to be slaughtered for cleansing rituals. In addition are the accompanying costs of purchasing clothes and food, hiring tents and equipment, or paying officials.

During the night vigil, the bishops also provide time for gifts and presents to the family. Bishops will do so by opening the gifts ceremony by reading Job 42:8, “Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that you not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.”

The evaluation above of the impact the cleansing rituals and the use of Numbers 19 have on those who practise cleansing rituals, calls for a more an in-depth analysis. This should be accompanied by a valid interpretation and understanding of Numbers 19 in the immediate context of the chapter and the whole Book as well as the wider context of the grand narrative of the Bible. Such an interpretation will be done in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: HERMENEUTICAL GUIDELINES AND EXEGESIS OF NUMBERS 19

3.1 Introduction

For an in-depth understanding and relevant contextualised application of Numbers 19 for contemporary audiences in Africa in a valid and responsible way, exegetical hermeneutical guidelines need to be considered. The specific research question of this study calls for an understanding of the basics of hermeneutical guidelines to read the Old Testament in a valid way, especially the passages about ceremonial laws.

As this is primarily a missiological study, it would exceed the scope of this study to present more than merely a brief summary and overview of relevant views of Old Testament scholars, systematic theologians and Missiologists on guidelines to interpret and apply the Old Testament in an African context. Only Old Testament Biblical Theology and Hermeneutical perspectives that are relevant for reading, interpreting and applying Numbers 19 can be dealt with.

The methodology of interpretation taken for this study is grammatico-historical exegesis. Such a methodology entails, as Kaiser and Silva (1994:19, 33) point out, first of all to determine the meaning of the text within its immediate and larger context as it was intended by the author himself, and then considering relevant contextual applications. To achieve this goal the literal meaning of words, rules of grammar, and the historical context of the author will be taken into consideration. Grammatico-historical exegesis is differs from the reader-response method, which moves in the opposite direction (Kaiser and Silva, 1994:32-33).

Space however does not permit for an exhaustive study. Only the salient points can be dealt with. In a following chapter Practical Theological, Homiletical and Missiological applications will be explored.

Numbers 19 also places contemporary Christian readers before the general question: How should contemporary Christians apply the Old Testament laws? Obviously commands in the Mosaic law are important, but a literal application of all the laws can be disastrous, contribute to syncretistic practices and fail to help contemporary

audiences experience the liberating message of God's transforming grace by understanding the core of the gospel as it is intended.

The literature on Old Testament Theology and Old Testament Hermeneutics is extremely varied and was written over many centuries. As a result one can easily feel overwhelmed and get lost in discerning a framework to construct a theological exposition and interpretation of Numbers 19. Especially literature on the manner in which the New Testament uses the Old Testament, provides a floodgate of materials. In his *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, Goldingay (1981), for example, published a 33-page bibliography, referring to scholars in this field. The number and nature of the references given in the footnotes of his document are far in excess of the requirements of an overview in this study, as this is primarily a missiological research project. The views of a few selected scholars who provide guidelines that are applicable for a valid interpretation of Numbers 19 will be considered.

3.2 Hermeneutics of Numbers 19

For the purpose of this study, namely to evaluate the use of Numbers 19 by leaders of AICs in their ministries, it is necessary to consider general theological, hermeneutical and missiological guidelines that are important for a valid understanding and application of this biblical passage.

3.2.1 Scholars in hermeneutics of the Old Testament

The study will first briefly summarise and discuss the views from a number of acknowledged Old Testament scholars.

3.2.1.1 John Goldingay

Goldingay's aim is not to add yet another attempt to find a single centre around which to construct a theology of the Old Testament. Rather, his central conviction is that "Each has seemed in some circles the way to understand the Old Testament. Each is certainly a way" (Goldingay, 1981:14).

Goldingay summarises previous approaches on the topic into five groups, describes how each has been developed in scholarly circles, particularly since 1945, and adds his own criticism and appreciation. By this method he aims to draw out aspects that he

regards as valuable in each of these scholars for current study and interpretation of the Old Testament.

In his second chapter on “The Old Testament as a way of life” Goldingay deals in depth with the question whether it is satisfactory to subsume the whole Old Testament under the heading of “law”. He also lists and describes the problems of applying the specific commands of the Old Testament in contemporary Christian ethics. Thereafter he suggests relevant guidelines for hermeneutics.

A key principle for Goldingay relevant to the present study is that “faith is impossible if it has no historical grounds” (Goldingay 1981:73). In an article published in 1975 in the Tyndale bulletin he also stresses that the Old and New Testament belong together in the canon of Scripture, “In a sense there can be no Old Testament theology, or rather it is a discipline without a *raison d’être*; and there can be no New Testament theology that omits all the New Testament’s unspoken Old Testament presuppositions. There can in fact only be a biblical theology which cross-sections the whole canon” (Goldingay, 1975:50). In other words, a passage needs to be considered more literally in the context of biblical theology, not just of (intra-) biblical exegesis.

Goldingay expresses the opinion that the final canonical shape of the Old Testament is an unfortunate one which ought not to influence contemporary understanding of it. “The arrangement ‘Torah-prophets-writings’ separates off Genesis-Deuteronomy from Joshua, which really completes this great statement of the foundational salvation-history. It does this, no doubt, under the influence of the later postexilic law religion: Israel’s foundation document is now predominantly law. And this is how the New Testament speaks of it, in response to current Jewish attitudes. But it is thereby perverted into legalism. Positive Christian exegesis of the Pentateuch can go back to seeing it as gospel, or (to use its own term) as covenant.”

The value of Goldingay’s findings is the insight that the Book of Numbers should be read within the context of the whole Pentateuch and chapter 19 should not be understood apart from the historical incidents described before and after chapter 19, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.2.1.2 John H. Sailhamer

Sailhamer (2009) provides a programmatic model of how the theology of the Old Testament ought to be addressed. He calls his particular understanding a “canonical” approach, which he outlines in the second major section of his book (Sailhamer, 2009:253-311).

Sailhamer argues that the task of Old Testament theology is to determine the meaning of the text of Scripture, not the events described by the text (2009:68-148). He advocates a compositional approach that works with the final, canonical form of the Pentateuch. In this light he poses the following suppositions: an Old Testament theology must be based on the biblical text and not events; the canon as it stands *is* the text for theology; a special hermeneutic must be applied since the Old Testament is revelation; and the diachronic view is the only one true to the nature of the Old Testament as a progressively revealed collection of texts.

In an article in Westminster Journal in 1991 that was published as an appendix in his book of 2009, Sailhamer summarises his view on interpreting and understanding the Pentateuch as a narrative strategy. This strategy contrasts Abraham, who kept the law, and Moses, whose faith was weakened under the law. Sailhamer then sees a conscious effort on the part of the author of the Pentateuch to distinguish a life of faith before the law (*ante legem*) from a lack of faith under the law (*sub lege*). He states this view as follows, “Abraham lived by faith (Gn 15:6), in Egypt the Israelites lived by faith (Exod 4), they came out of Egypt by faith (Exod 14:31) and they approached Mount Sinai by faith (Exod 19:9). However, after the giving of the law, no longer was the life of God’s people marked by faith. Even their leaders, Moses and Aaron, failed to believe in God after the coming of the law” (Sailhamer 1991:260).

Sailhamer’s effort to maintain the unity of the Pentateuch and his emphasis on reading the Pentateuch as a narrative can be appreciated. Nevertheless the contradiction he posits between Abraham and Moses as a main theme is not very convincing. It gives the impression of a forced approach that does not provide a real framework to interpret the meaning of ceremonial laws in depth.

3.2.1.3 Grant Osborne

Osborne (1991) provides a substantial and thoughtful treatment of both historical and current issues of the hermeneutical debate. Osborne introduces a better way to handle the idea of the “hermeneutical circle” from the New Hermeneutic in his publication *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. He summarises the deficiencies of past approaches and chooses the metaphor of a spiral to describe the interpretive process seeing that “it is not a closed circle (i.e., the process) but rather an open-ended movement from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader. I am not going round and round a closed circle that can never detect the true meaning but am spiralling nearer and nearer to the text’s intended meaning as I refine my hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations, then to guide my delineation of its significance for my situation today. The sacred author’s intended meaning is the critical starting point, but not an end in itself” (Osborne, 1991:6). Such a spiral also forms the major premise for his book.

Osborne builds on E. D. Hirsch’s distinction between the author’s intended meaning of a text which does not vary, and the application of the original meaning into the contemporary setting. The process and the presuppositions which undergird his study are well-outlined in the introduction to the book (Osborne, 1991:5-15), where he recognises the ties of meaning to literary genre and both the simplicity (clarity) and diversity of texts.

He proposes a ten-stage process of interpretation that he breaks down into three major sections. The first section deals with general hermeneutics and covers the foundational issues of context, grammar, semantics, syntax, and historical and cultural backgrounds. Much of this is applicable to a valid interpretation of Numbers 19.

He then proceeds to provide a basic semantic theory which he calls, “the heart of the entire book” (Osborne, 1991:75). Osborne’s whole approach underlines his desire to be of practical assistance to the pastor who faces the on-going discipline of exegesis combined with contemporary contextualisation (cf. pp. 117-118 under Chapter 4: “Syntax”). He stresses that there is in current research a “dialogue between five components of the hermeneutical process: exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology and practical theology” which Osborne calls “contextualisation” = homiletics).

One of the most significant arguments relevant for a holistic understanding and valid application of Numbers 19 is found on page 267, where he suggests integrating biblical and systematic theology in response to the diversity present in the biblical kerygma.

Frequently hermeneutics is presented in isolation from practical application. The result has often been preaching that does not address the existential questions of the audience, due to a lack of contextualisation.

3.2.1.4 **Graham Goldsworthy**

Goldsworthy has a meta-narrative approach to biblical theology in that he does not identify a single theme as the central idea, but argues that there is an overarching meta-narrative that unifies the Scriptures. He seeks to provide a measure of coherence to Biblical Theology by formulating a biblical-theological schema in accordance with the work of Donald Robinson and Gabriel Hebert (2012:40). Goldsworthy defines biblical theology as “the study of how every text in the Bible relates to every other text in the Bible” and as “the study of the matrix of divine revelation in the Bible as a whole.” (2012:40) This definition is refined by stating that biblical theology is the study of how all texts relate to Christ and the Gospel. Goldsworthy then links his proposal with salvation history, underscoring the importance of biblical revelation and its unified progression. He notes that the degree to which scholars hold to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture will affect their approach to biblical theology.

Goldsworthy understands Christ to be at the centre of biblical theology, and then argues that the incarnation of Jesus is the link between the Testaments and stands at the centre of God’s plan, which begun at the creation and are to be completed in the new creation, and epitomized by God’s presence with his people. In light of this Christ-centred understanding, Goldsworthy sees the kingdom of God, “defined simply as God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule,” as the central theme in Scripture (Goldsworthy,2012:75).

Probably because Goldsworthy has already developed his biblical-theological approach to the text in previous works (see e.g., 2002), he does not spend much time discussing method in this 2012 publication. He does affirm, though, that there are a number of different approaches to the task of biblical theology but he focuses on demonstrating

what he believes is the essential structure of biblical revelation to be captured by biblical theology that is conducted properly.

According to him the methods for studying biblical theology include careful thematic or word study; contextual studies of individual texts, Books, or corpora; Old or New Testament theologies; and theologies focusing on the whole Bible as canon.

Important for an African contextualised understanding and application of Numbers 19 is that Goldsworthy asserts that all the above-mentioned investigations are performed in order to edify the people of God and to help them grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

3.2.1.5 **Sinclair Ferguson**

Although Sinclair Ferguson is a professor in Systematic Theology, he published a book on preaching Christ from the Old Testament (Ferguson, 2002:4). This theme is very relevant for a valid understanding and application of Numbers 19. He argues that there are two ways of reading the Old Testament: one that, in the light of New Testament revelation, recognises the Christological content present in the Old Testament, and another that reads the Old Testament in its own historical context.

He refers to an illustration of Benjamin Warfield who stated, “The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it, but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before” (Warfield, 1991:141).

Ferguson (2002:5) then applies this illustration as follows, “To read the Old Testament with the light switched off would be to deny the historical reality of our own context. On the other hand, we would be denying the historical reality of the text and its context if we were to read and preach it as though that same light had already been switched on within its own pages. Thus our task as Christian preachers must be to take account of both.”

In light of Ferguson’s view, the present study aims to consider Numbers 19 with the “dim light” of the original author and audience, and then seek to apply it to African AIC leader’s context in the light of the full revelation of God’s transforming grace through Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

3.2.1.6 Verne Poythress

To understand and interpret the laws of the Old Testament in a valid way for a contemporary audience, Poythress (1990²) explains that scholars have a threefold task. **Firstly**, they should understand the law of Moses on its own terms, within its own historical environment. God intended these laws to be heard and understood by Israelites who had then just been redeemed from Egypt. **Secondly**, scholars should understand how the New Testament completes God's story and God's words He began to speak in the Old Testament. **Thirdly**, scholars must obey and apply God's words to themselves and their own circumstances. Poythress rightly warns that biblical scholars often stop at the first step and then draw direct applications for today's hearers.

This view of Poythress is especially relevant for pastors in the AICs. In evaluating the use and understanding of the Pentateuch by AIC church leaders, it is important to consider the views of Thiselton as well (1980:11) who explains that hermeneutics traditionally entailed the formulation of rules for the understanding of an ancient text, especially in linguistic and historical terms. The interpreter was urged to begin with the language of the text, including its grammar, vocabulary, and style. He examined its linguistic, literary, and historical context. In other words, traditional hermeneutics began with the recognition that a text was conditioned by a given historical context. However, hermeneutics, according to Thiselton, in more recent times pay serious attention to the recognition that historical conditioning is two-sided: the modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition.

Concerning the issues of preaching Christ from the Old Testament in a valid way, Poythress explains that it is legitimate and necessary to read the first part of the story again in the light of the outcomes at the end. By doing so scholars may understand more clearly how the beginning already introduced the teachings and the tensions that are completed and resolved at the end. Jesus Christ himself is the centre of New Testament revelation. Since the New Testament completes the story begun in the Old, Christ is also the centre of which the Old Testament begins to speak in its preliminary way, and to which the Old Testament points forward. After the first and second reading has been done, the message can be applied to contemporary audiences within their own context in the most valid and effective ways.

² Since his publication was read in software form there are no page numbers available.

Although this researcher agrees with Poythress, it needs to be seen that this also holds true of the conceptual and integrative part of exegesis. In line with the guidelines of Duvall and Hays (2005: 25), Numbers 19 needs to be understood in its immediate and historical context, after which other parts of Scripture should be considered, including the New Testament.

This approach presently coined by some as *ChristotelicHermeneutics* (Enns, 2003:277; Evans, 2008:3). This implies that one cannot discover the New Testament meaning of Old Testament texts merely through historical-grammatical exegesis, but only from the perspective of the apostles focusing on Christ post-resurrection.

In a *Christocentric approach* the concern is that the Gospel of God's Son, is the central redemptive subjective matter of Old and New Testaments alike, (the grand narrative of the whole Bible). Building on this view, the *Christotelic* approach emphasises that, while Christ is the central redemptive subjective matter of the Old Testament, He also is the consummative *telos* of this Testament.

Proponents of the Christotelic approach view Christ as the *telos* or goal of the Old Testament. However, they are adamant that it implies scholars should first of all do their utmost to understand Old Testament passages in its own right, through the eyes and ears of the original audience. Thereafter researchers and interpreters should apply valid hermeneutical and homiletical guidelines to point out how passages in the Old Testament actually find its fulfilment in Christ.

In an article on the use of Psalm 22 in the New Testament, Poythress (1986:273) formulates the view as follows, "As a second, later, step [beyond the grammatical-historical], we relate Psalm 22 to earlier canonical books and finally to the NT. Whatever we find at this stage must harmonize with the results of approach (a) [i.e., grammatical-historical reading of the passage in question]. But we come to 'extra' insights and deeper understandings as we relate Psalm 22 to the NT. These extra things are not 'in' Psalm 22 in itself. They are not somehow mystically hidden in the psalm, so that someone with some esoteric key to interpretation could have come up with them just by reading the psalm in isolation from the rest of the Bible. Psalm 22 in itself gives us only what we get from approach (a). The extra things arise from the relations that Psalm 22 has with earlier canonical books (approach (b), with the NT, and with the events of Christ's death. These relations, established by God, provide the basis for our

proceeding to another stage forward in understanding ... the 'extra' understanding comes from the biblical canon itself, taken as a whole." He goes on to stress: "But I am also concerned to distinguish, from a scholarly point of view, between what is 'in' the passage and what arises from comparison of the passage with later revelation" (Poythress, 1986:276).

Wright (1992:ix) also makes the point that thorough study and analysis of Old Testament texts helps Christians to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Jesus as the Christ. He states, "In short, the deeper you go into an understanding of the Old Testament, the closer you come to the heart of Jesus."

It thus becomes clear that for a valid interpretation and application of Old Testament texts the preacher must be aware of a hermeneutic circle of three horizons or contexts:

- the context of the first audience;
- the post-resurrection of Christ, and the context of the preacher or interpreter him- or herself – or *new-covenant* context of the interpreter as Duvall, and Hays (2005:20) calls it;
- the context of a contemporary audience – which for the purpose of the present research, are Africans of AICs, living in or being in the process of moving out of a typical African animistic worldview

These three contexts must be kept in mind constantly.

3.2.2 Contextualisation

In an article "The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration and Communication" Hesselgrave (1985:442 ff) points out that there has never been a time as the present when greater consideration has been given to a delineation of contexts or to an examination of their influence on understanding texts.

This view is in line with Osborne (1991:5) who makes it clear that the division between application and hermeneutics can merely be a dotted line and not a radical line. According to him hermeneutics includes what the text meant and what it means, and uses the term "contextualizing" referring to contemporary application. Silva expresses a similar position speaking of "hermeneutic" as the meaning of Scripture for our day

(Silva, 2007:231). Kaiser (2007:272) agrees by calling application an integral part of the hermeneutical task. Kaiser and Silva also states that interpretation must include the current relevancy, application, and contemporary significance of a text (2007:57).

This study holds to the position that interpretation of a text in a specific context will only be complete, valid and relevant when the interpreter is well aware of the of the questions and issues with which the present-day audience is struggling. In Missiology this “awareness” is called *contextualisation*.

Valid contextualisation implies the relevant application of the meaning of texts in a specific context which requires from a minister of the Word to apply incarnational theology and ministry (Jh 1:14-18, Ac 17:19, 1 Cor 9:19-22. Cf. also Conn, 1984; Gilliland, 1989; Hesselgrave, 1989, Hesselgrave, 1991; Cortez, 2005.) Contextualisation means that the Word must dwell among all families of humankind at present as truly as Jesus lived among his own kin. The Gospel is Good News when it provides answers for a particular people living in a particular place at a particular time. This means the worldview and culture of people in a specific context provides a framework for communication. The questions and needs of that people provide a guide for the emphasis of the message, and their cultural gifts become the medium of expression. This implies that the interpreter have to know and understand the worldview and culture of his audience in order to *connect* with them so that they can eventually be *confronted* with the claims of the Gospel on their lives. Cultural differences in individuals should be learned and utilised with discernment to advance the Gospel. The message should be mastered so well that it can be communicated in culturally relevant ways without compromising its meaning.

It cannot be denied that theology – even conservative Evangelical and Reformed theology – is influenced, at least to some extent, by culture. In this regard Bavinck (2003:59) writes, “Christian theologians must place themselves within the circle of faith and, while using the church tradition and experience, take their stand in the reality of revelation. Though dogmaticians are bound to divine revelation and must take seriously the confessions of the church, their work is also personal and contextual.”

Lesslie Newbigin is seen as a leading Evangelical scholar in Missiology. He asserts: “We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that

is meant something which is not embedded in a culture ... Every interpretation of the Gospel is embodied in some cultural form” (Newbiggin, 1989:144).

The *Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture* (Lausanne, 78) the result of a consultation in which 33 Evangelical theologians, anthropologists, linguists, missionaries from all six continents of the world, provides clear guidelines on maintaining the normative nature of the Scripture. The report, however, makes it clear that, although the essential meaning of the biblical message must be retained at all costs, critical discernment of the text's inner meaning and a translation of it into a specific contemporary culture should be handled carefully. Yet, according to this report, there is often a weakness in traditional approaches of Evangelicals, “The weakness of this ‘historical’ approach, however, is that it fails to consider what Scripture may be saying to the contemporary reader. It stops short at the meaning of the Bible in its own time and culture. It is thus liable to analyze the text without applying it, and to acquire academic knowledge without obedience. The interpreter may also tend to exaggerate the possibility of complete objectivity and ignore his or her own cultural presuppositions” (Lausanne Movement, 1978).

Kanyoro (1997:364) from Kenya illustrates this lack of contextualisation in reading and interpreting the Old Testament excellently, in an article describing how people from Western Kenya reads the Bible. She makes it clear that not knowing the nuances of the culture of modern readers of the Bible has more far-reaching repercussions on biblical hermeneutics than is normally acknowledged. Kanyoro points out how “cultural hermeneutics” is a key to help people to be liberated from cultural bondage. Without incarnational ministry, one cannot be sure of exactly what people understand when they read the Bible. Kanyoro then proves with examples that “cultural hermeneutics” that understands the thinking of the audience is a key to reading the Bible in the African context and will force the academic community to include rural and illiterate Africans in their hermeneutical thinking. Due to illiteracy and the “power of the pen”, the experiences and exegetical work of rural African people is still largely absent in academic and literary spheres and thinking. Kanyoro then concludes: “No theology is adequate if it cannot speak to and from the experiences of its participants, its doers and its hearers” (Kanyoro,1997:364).

Missionaries who hold to this view would go to another culture and make pains to understand this culture in an effort to convey the Gospel message understandable. But

recognizing that they do not comprehend the whole message of the Bible in all its scope, richness and balance, missionaries will also be open to discovering new insights from the receptor culture that will help them understand the Bible better. When Scripture is accepted as the supreme authority, then the text-context movement is a spiral moving biblical scholars toward a better understanding of the Word and how it can be communicated and applied in a particular culture.

Carson (1987:218) also refers to three “horizons of understanding” that are integral to responsible, orthodox hermeneutics:

- the Biblical documents themselves: the first listeners or readers of Scripture as their perspective is found in the Bible;
- the interpreter’s horizon: that is present readers, who attempt to understand the Scriptures in their own situation;
- the horizon of understanding of the group that is being evangelised.

Carson points out that these three horizons pose challenges to the interpretation and application of Scriptures, particularly as interpreters attempt to cross from the second horizon to the third. The missionary, therefore, must attempt to “fuse his own horizon of understanding with the horizon of understanding the text, and then attempt to bridge the gap between his own horizon of understanding, as it has been informed and instructed by the text, and the horizon of the person or people to whom he ministers.” (Carson,1984:1). The challenge of hermeneutics is to transpose the message from its original historical context into the context of the present day hearers, and thereby produce the same kind of impact on their lives as it did on the original hearers or readers.

Vanhoozer (2007:41) explains the challenge: “... one’s theology of culture ... will have a decisive bearing on the seriousness and openness with which the church approaches culture: is it a battleground on which to engage the enemy, a classroom in which to learn, a sanctuary in which to worship? Is it beneficial or harmful to our spiritual health? Is the cultural atmosphere polluted and, if so should we flee it or clean it?”

In the same vein, Paul does not reject all human cultures outright as the result of the fall. He affirms cultural particularity and uses it to share the Gospel (Ac. 17:19-31; 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

3.2.3 Valid application of biblical law

This study focuses on the valid application of the ceremonial laws described in Numbers 19, read within the context of the Pentateuch. Therefore, it may be helpful to summarise and consider traditional ways of Evangelical theologians' application of biblical law.

Many Christians in Africa adhere to certain laws in the Pentateuch and ignore others. They make this decision based merely on whether a law seems to be relevant for their context. However, this may lead to a haphazard and merely contextually-driven approach, which is inadequate to interpreting the Old Testament law.

Essential for a valid interpretation of Numbers 19 is the insight, as Hays (2001:23) points out, that the Mosaic Law is firmly embedded in Israel's theological history, "It is an integral part of the story that runs from Genesis 12 through 2 Kings 25. The law is not presented by itself, as some sort of disconnected but timeless universal code of behaviour. Rather it is presented as part of the theological narrative that describes how God delivered Israel from Egypt and then established them in the Promised Land as His people."

Numbers. 1:1 starts off with the story in the second year after the Exodus and describes the Israelites' journeys and wanderings for the next four decades (33:38). Israel's rejection of the Lord's promise described in chapters 13 and 14 is central to the Book. This disobedience resulted in the years of wandering recorded in Numbers. At various points during the story, God presented Israel with additional laws.

According to the New Testament testimony, Jesus made it clear that the meaning of the Law must be interpreted in light of His coming and in light of the profound changes introduced by the New Covenant. Carson, (1984:142-144; France, (1989:194-195), and Hagner (1993:104-106) express similar views.

This does not imply that the laws in the Old Covenant became fully null and void, or obsolete. The laws that are still relevant have merely received a new foundation in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul did not use the Mosaic law as the

basis for Christian moral behaviour. As Goldingay points out, Paul “does not generally base his moral teaching on this foundation but on the nature of the gospel, the guidance of the Spirit, and the practice of the churches” (Goldingay 1995:103).

This research accepts the formulation of the Belgic Confession as stated in article 25:

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled.

Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to his will.

In order to “use the witnesses drawn from the law ...” and in the same time avoid violation of proper hermeneutical method, the interpretation of Numbers 19 in the present study will be directed by the following guidelines:

- Identify what the particular law of ceremonial cleansing meant to the initial audience.
- Determine the differences between the initial audience and Christian believers today.
- Develop universal principles from the text.
- Correlate the principle with New Testament teaching.
- Apply the modified universal principle to life of current members of AICs.

3.2.1 Biblical theological and redemptive historical perspectives

To interpret and evaluate Numbers 19 in a valid and contextually sensitive way it is important also to consider the broader biblical theological and redemptive historical context of the passage. Apart from Numbers 19 there are several other passages that narrate ceremonial uncleanness caused by touching dead bodies and water used as cleansing agent. A study on the meaning of life and death in humans’ relationship with God provide insights that may assist an in-depth evaluation of the AIC’s interpretation of this passage.

As this is primarily a missiological study, only a summary of key aspects can be given. This subsection thus heavily relied (with gratitude) on an article of Harris (1986:47-51), to indicate aspects of continuity of the Old Testament's revelation about the meaning of life and death in the New Testament. This interpretation assists the current-day reader of Numbers 19 make a relevant application of the passage.

In Old Testament Biblical theology the concepts of life and death are key concepts when coming to grips with God's revelation of himself and his relationship to humans, especially to his covenant people. The Hebrew root *haya*, "live", appears approximately 800 times in the Old Testament, while the Hebrew root *mut*, "death", can be found more than 1 000 times (Kaiser, 2011:3)

Death was never treated in the Old Testament as an event that was good or even final, for it involved the realm of the unclean (Lv 11:24; Nm 19:11). Life was the key concept and was to be preferred over death. God had meant for humans to live forever – and then sin entered into the world through the fall.

The realm of death was a constant threat to humans in the Old Testament but this threat was averted when YHWH turned his face toward the individual whose life was threatened. The promise and hope of life, is to be found mostly in the sanctuary where the community is gathered together in order to worship God in his majestic holiness and amazing grace for his people.

In general the Old Testament narratives portray death as a divine punishment. An important passage that helps to understand the Old Testament perception of death is the account of its origin. Attention naturally focuses on the early chapters of Genesis where, in the narrative of the garden of Eden (Gn 2:4 – 3:24), the issue of death is introduced for the first time.

Death in this form was understood as unnatural as can be deduced from various regulations in Leviticus and Numbers. Numbers 19:16 stipulates: "Anyone out in the open who touches someone who has been killed with a sword or someone who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days." Thus corpses and objects closely associated with death have the result of defiling an individual. This fact is underlined by the preceding verses of the same chapter: verses 11-13 describe the process of purification that becomes necessary after

touching a corpse; and verses 14-15 indicate that one is defiled merely by entering a tent in which there is a dead body.

Stricter rules that limit contact with corpses are applied to priests (Lv 21:2–3, 10–11) and Nazirites (Nm 6:6-12; cf. Jdg. 14:8-9). Finally, Leviticus 11 reveals that, unless they have been ritually slaughtered, the carcasses of all animals are to be considered unclean.

In the Old Testament death is mostly presented in negative terms: death, like sin, defiles and pollutes. In an interesting article on “The Old Testament View of Life after Death”, Alexander (1986:41-45) points out that the weight of evidence surely favours the view that the Hebrews at that time certainly perceived death as a punishment for humans’ rebellion against God. He then convincingly argues that *Sheol* always conveys negative overtones, “... it is somewhere fearful and to be avoided (e.g. 2 Sm 22:6; Ps 16:10; 30:3; 86:13); it is the antithesis of heaven (e.g. Jb 11:8; Ps 139:8; Am 9:2). Secondly, in a significant amount of passages *Sheol* is linked unquestionably with evil-doers (e.g. Nm 16:30, 33; 1 Ki 2:6, 9; Jb. 24:19; Ps 9:17; 31:17; 49:14; Pr. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; Is 5:14; 14:9, 11, 15; Ez 31:15-17; 32:21, 27). Taken together these observations would seem to indicate that *Sheol* does indeed denote the ultimate abode of the wicked” (Ibid.: 43).

The belief that *Sheol* was the final abode of the wicked is in keeping with the idea that the Hebrews perceived death as punitive rather than as a natural occurrence. Since humankind was considered to be under divine condemnation, the normal consequence of dying was imprisonment in a dark, gloomy region from which no one could ever escape. Going down to *Sheol* was to suffer a “bad” death.

The Old Testament narratives give only a few indications of what the destination of the righteous after death would entail. Yet the expressions “to be gathered to one’s people” (Gn 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33; Nm 27:13; 31:2; Dt 32:50) or “to be gathered to one” fathers’ (Jgs 2:10; 2 Kgs 22:20; 2 Chr 34:28) provide some clues. These figures of speech do not refer to the interment in the grave of the fathers, or the ancestral tomb, as becomes clear from the fact that Abraham, Aaron and Moses were not united with their fathers in the grave. There also is no reference to burial in general, for in the stories of the “gathering” of Abraham and Isaac it is expressly added that they were buried (Gn 25:8-9; 35:29). Alexander remarks, “Significantly, in their use of the expression ‘to be

gathered to one' fathers' (or 'people') the biblical writers seem to convey a sense of optimism regarding death (cf. Gn 15:15). Although death may separate an individual from his family and kin in this life, the righteous are reunited with those members of their families who have already died" (Alexander, 1986:41-45).

Whereas the wicked were thought to remain in the dark, silent region of *Sheol*, the righteous were seen to live in the hope that God would deliver them from the power of death and take them to himself (cf. Ps 49:15). In Psalm 16 and 49:15 is an expression that the righteous through faith asserts that God will be with him and the hand of *Sheol* is impotent against the presence of YHWH with those who are his own.

In contrast to this overarching Old Testament testimony that the righteous find refuge in God's forgiveness and power over death, the AICs believe that, after death all people go to the same place. This is, namely the abode of the deceased ancestors' underground (*abaphansi* in Zulu) who determines the well-being of those who are still living.

This belief is also wholly in contrast with the Old Testament's general testimony that there is no communication between the living and the dead. In this regard Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 states that "... the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun." This recalls similar mentionings in Job 14:21-22 and 2 Kings 22:20. These statements are not asserting that the dead are asleep, but rather that the dead have no contact with this world (cf. also Carson *et al.*, 1994:616).

God revealed the meaning of life and death in concert with his plan for the coming of his kingdom over an extended period of time. Hebrews 1:1 states: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Therefore, earlier revelations must be read in the light of later ones (on the same subject) for believers' application in their day. After studying the intention of the message for the original readers of a Bible pericope, it is necessary to consider how the symbols related in the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ. The full narrative story is yet to be completed. Earlier promissory statements of God may be more deeply understood and applied once the promises contained in

ceremonies begin to be fulfilled, and especially when these promises are completely fulfilled (Poythress, 1986:226).

For a relevant application of Numbers 19 it is therefore necessary to consider the continuity as well as discontinuity of God's revelation about the meaning of life and death of the Old Testament in the New Testament.

Life and death

The testimony of the personal relationship between God and the righteous in terms of life and death is confirmed in the New Testament. Death is depicted as a realm where the evil one reigns (Hb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:14; Rv 1:18; 20:13), as a ruler who dominates his subjects (Rm 5:14, 17) or as a warrior bent on destruction (Ac 2:24; 1 Cr 15:26; Rv 6:8; 20:14).

Spiritual death refers to humankind's natural alienation from God and hostility to God that are expressed in sin (Mt 8:22; Jn 5:24–25; Rm 6:23; Jas 5:20; Jude 12). Both the physical and spiritual death are portrayed as the consequence and penalty of sin and the common lot of humankind (Rm 5:12; 6:23; 7:13; Ep 2:1, 5; Hb 9:27). The "second death" describes the permanent separation from God that befalls those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life (Rv 2:11; 20:6, 14-15; 21:8).

Immortality

According to New Testament usage, "immortality" denotes immunity from decay and death, an immunity that results from sharing the eternal divine life. Just as God is "never-dying" (Rm 1:23; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:16) because he is "ever-living" (Jn 5:26), so believers are destined to become immune from decay and death because they will participate fully and immediately in God's life (2 Pt 1:4). Immortality is a natural attribute of God alone (1 Tm 6:16). A future acquisition of eternal life by the righteous is gained by means of a resurrection transformation (Rm 2:7; 1 Cr 15:52–54).

Immortality is conditional, but only in the sense that there is no eternal life except in Christ. For the New Testament's testimony, the opposite of immortality is not non-existence but the "second death" (Rv 20:6, 14) which involves exclusion from God's presence (2 Thes 1:9). All human beings survive beyond death but there will be a clear

division between those who believe and trust in Christ, and those who do not believe in him.

Life after death

Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) to illustrate the danger of wealth (Lk 6:24) and the necessity of repentance before a person dies, (Lk 16:28-30). But one may legitimately deduce from the setting of the story the basic characteristics of the post-mortem state of believers in contrast to unbelievers.

- Both groups are conscious of their surroundings: Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom and comforted (vv 22-23, 25), the rich man is in Hades and tormented (vv 23-25, 28).
- There is memory of the past: the rich man is instructed to "remember" earlier circumstances (v 25), and he can recall his family and their attitude to "Moses and the prophets" (vv 27-30).
- The whole dialogue with Abraham suggests that the departed have not only retained their capacity to reason (v 30) but also gained an acute perception (vv 27-28).

Significantly, the same three characteristics (consciousness, memory, rationality) may be deduced from the plea for vindication uttered by the martyrs who rest under the altar in God's presence (Rv 6:9-10): "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (v 10). Paul expresses a preference (2 Cr 5:8) or a desire (Phil 1:23) to leave the securities of earthly existence and reside with the Lord.

It is clear from the overarching testimony of the New Testament that, for the believer, life after death involves fellowship with Christ that is even more profound than the experience of Christ in the present life on earth. Not only are departed believers safe in God's hands (Lk 23:46; cf. Ac 7:59) as they "rest" from their labours in joyful satisfaction (Hb 4:10; Rv 14:13); they also "live for God's glory" (Lk 20:38) and "live spiritually, as God does" (1 Pt 4:6).

Ceremonial laws and rituals

When considering passages from the Book of Hebrews it becomes clear that there is definite discontinuity regarding the ceremonial laws, and especially the cleansing ritual instructed in Numbers 19. Hebrews 9:13-14 states, “For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

The old period – the old covenant – only pointed to the solution, but did not solve the problem. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who have been defiled, sanctify the cleansing of the flesh (i.e. ceremonial cleansing, but not true moral, spiritual cleansing), as the blood of Christ, cleanse believers’ conscience.

In the following chapter guidelines will be given for the application of these biblical theological principles in practical theology, for homiletical approaches, as well as missiological implications of a valid Christ-centred interpretation of Numbers 19 in an African context.

3.3 The exegetical work of Numbers 19:17-19

Numbers 19:17-19 has been chosen as the focal text of the present study. Naturally other verses will be used as well for a proper exegesis of the topic.

The New International Version (NIV) has been selected as the reading version for these verses. This is because it is the most used version and is based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts. This makes it one of the trusted English versions. The NIV translation of the mentioned passage reads as follows:

Table 3-1: The New International Version

NIV
<i>(17) For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh over them.</i>
<i>(18) Then a man who is ceremonially is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also</i>

sprinkle anyone who has touched a human body bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death.

(19) The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bath with water, and that evening he will be clean

In doing exegesis, the broad terms of the guidelines of Duvall and Hays (2005:25) will be followed:

- The meaning of the text for biblical readers
- The differences between the biblical readers and the contemporary readers
- General theological principles
- Application of the theological principles for contemporary readers

Therefore, the exegesis will be a literary study done on the results of Hebrew and Old Testament scholars as expressed in a few commentaries and dictionaries; and views expressed in a number of articles will be compared.

As the main purpose of this study is to provide a valid missiological analysis and critique of the ways Numbers 19 is used by the leaders of AICs, this chapter will not attempt an in-depth scholarly exegesis of Numbers 19. The exegesis will only focus on the interpretation of key aspects of the chapter that has to be taken into account when the typical AIC interpretation is debated.

3.3.1 The meaning of the text for biblical readers

3.3.1.1 Comparison of English translations

Important differences between translations have been underlined in the table below:

Table 3-2: Comparison of English translations

NIV	KJV	TEV
<p>(9) A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for <u>purification from sin</u></p>	<p>(9) And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for water of separation: it is a <u>purification for sin</u></p>	<p>(9) The a man who is ritually clean is to collect he ashes of the cow and put them in a ritually clean place outside the camp, where they are to be kept for the Israelite community to use in preparing the water for removing ritual uncleanness. <u>This ritual is performed to remove sin</u></p>
<p>(17) For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned <u>purification offering</u> into a jar and pour fresh water over them.</p>	<p>(17) And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of <u>purification for sin</u>, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel:</p>	<p>(17) To remove the uncleanness, some ashes from the red cow which was burnt to <u>remove sin</u> shall be taken and put in a pot, and fresh water added.</p>

In the way translated above, the words in Numbers 19:9, "... it is for purification from sin" (Bible, 1991) are translated in the King James Version with, "it is a purification for sin" (Bible, 1970). The same words are translated in Today's English Version with, "... this ritual is performed to remove sin" (Bible, 2007).

The words in verse 17, "... purification offering" (Bible, 1991) are translated in the King James Version with, "... purification for sin" (Bible, 1970). In Today's English Version translation reads, "... to remove sin" (Bible, 2007).

Before the researcher could deal with the differences of the translations, it is important to begin with the pronoun "it" of the last part of verse 9. Milgrom (1990:158-163) points out that this pronoun refers to the heifer if one reads the masculine form, but in the feminine form, it refers to *efer*, which means the ashes containing the ritual liquid which is the blood. It is these ashes mixed with water that will be sprinkled on the corpse-contaminated individual to remove the impurity. In short, it refers to the cleansing ritual. Therefore in verse 9 the cleansing ritual is referred to differently, depending on the translation, and its chief purpose is made clear.

Zodhiates (1996:1935) points out that the verb *ḥaṭā*(Q) "to sin, do wrong, miss the way", (P) "to purify, to cleanse, to offer sin offering" is not used in verse 9, but a noun, *ḥaṭṭât*, that is based on this verb. He continues to state that the noun (*ḥaṭṭât*) may mean sin, iniquity, sin offering, or purification offering. Moreover, the term *ḥaṭṭât* is the same word used in several Old Testament passages to indicate sin or sin offering (Lv 4:3ff, Nm 7:16ff, 2 Ki. 12:16, Ez. 43:19, 21, 25; cf. also Zodhiates, 1996:1515). Strong (1996:365) points out that the noun (*ḥaṭṭât*) may mean sin or sin offering. Livingston (1999:278) explains, "In the many instances in which the verb *ḥaṭā* occurs in the Qal stem the object is either God or his laws, or else the verb is intransitive. In so acting, man is missing the goal or standard God has for him, is failing to observe the requirements of holy living, or falls short of spiritual wholeness. ... In a religious sense, the majority of the Pi-el forms denote a cleansing or purifying ceremony during which sin is done away with, e.g. Ex 29:36; Lv 14:29, 52; Nm 19:19; Ps 51:7."

Some writers have determined the correct word to use in this case. To follow are a number of these versions. Certain writers claim that this term refers to "a sin offering" (Edersheim, 2003:346-348; Keil & Delitzsch, 1996:733-738), while others consider it to be a "purification offering" (Burger & Hill, 2012:134; Cole, 2000:312; Milgrom, 1990:158-163).

It is not easy to determine whether this term refers to a ritual *from* sin, *for* sin, purification offering, or sin offering, seeing that all of these versions can derive from the concept of *ḥaṭṭât*. For several reasons when read against the context of the rest of the

Book and the wider Pentateuch, however, it becomes clear that this term cannot refer to a sin offering. A sin offering had to be made regularly to ask God's forgiveness for the sins of the people (Lv 4 – 6), which is clearly not the case in this verse. Sin offerings involved different kinds of animals that people had to bring as offerings, for example, a young bull (Lv 4:3), a lamb (4:32), or if they could not afford a lamb, they were to bring two doves or two pigeons (5:5, 7); if these birds were too expensive, they were to offer a tenth of an *Ephah* (5:11) of fine flour mixed with grain, which is not the case here. However, the mentioned verse only refers to a heifer.

A sacrificial animal was slaughtered in the main entrance of the Tent of Meeting (4:4). The slaughtering took place outside the camp (v 3). After the sprinkling of the blood in the sanctuary, the high priest performed some actions: some of the blood was smeared on the horns of the altar (4:7, 18); the rest of the blood was poured at the base of the burnt offering (v 7); all the internal organs were removed and burnt at the altar of burnt offering (v 8-11) – all of the actions which was not the case in the mentioned verse. Then the hide and legs were burnt outside the camp (v 12). According to Numbers 19 the heifer was burnt completely with its hide and legs, without having it removed (v 5).

Unlike a sin offering, the animal of the cleansing ritual in Numbers 19, is a young heifer, female in gender, and was to be slaughtered and wholly burnt outside the camp (v 3, 5), and several elements of cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool were added to the burning heifer (v 6). Therefore, it can be concluded that this ritual was either to remove sin that occurred by touching something that should remain untouched, or to purify people from the uncleanness that occurred by touching a corpse, which is regarded as unclean.

This conclusion helps to show that the cleansing ritual, according to Numbers 19:9, is performed to remove sin, which is the ultimate purpose of the mentioned ritual.

This view is confirmed by Pfeiffer and Harrison (1990:135), who point out that the goal of this ritual was to provide a simple way to purify Israelites from a very common defilement. The people experienced in their conscience the relation between sin and death and the need for deliverance from the curse of death as it represents the punishment for sin.

The items below are crucial in understanding Numbers 19. Some of these items are elaborated on further in similar sections of this chapter.

3.3.1.2 Important words and items in sentences and paragraphs of Numbers 19.

1. *Repetition of words*

The following words are repeated in Numbers 19:

- *Red heifer*

The term “red heifer” is used several times in the chapter (vv 2- 5, 8-10, 17). The term denotes a young cow (Keil& Delitzsch, 1996: 733-738). This point is explained further in this chapter.

- *Tent*

The word “tent” is mentioned more than once in the King James version (vv 14, 18).

This meaning was different from the “Tent of Meeting”, the “LORD’s tabernacle” or the “sanctuary of the LORD”, where the high priest Eleazar sprinkled the blood of the red heifer seven times (v 4, 13, 20). The word “tent” here refers to a dwelling place. The Israelites used to live in tents in their wilderness wandering on their way to Canaan. Speaking of this tent, God stated that anyone who died in it would make it ceremonially unclean. And whoever was present when death occurred, or whoever entered this tent would be considered ceremonially unclean.

- *A container without lid/open vessels*

Verses 15 and 18 mention a container without lid, where other translations refer to “open vessels” instead. Therefore, every open container without a lid fastened on it, in the tent, would be viewed as ceremonially unclean. For the understanding of the meaning of “a container without a lid fastened on it” Milgrom (1990: 161) explains that this was a “lid” or “covering” attached to the vessel by cords passing through holes in the lid and through the handles of the vessel. Such a lid would keep the vessel tightly closed and preserve it from defilement”. In the same vein, Keil & Delitzsch (1996: 733-738) point out, “Open vessel upon which there was not a covering, string, i.e. that had not a covering fastened by string, to prevent the smell of the corpse from penetrating it.”

To give clarity on how people and objects got unclean in the tent, Milgrom (1990: 161) explains: “The principle of *ma’ahil*, ‘overhanging’ applies. The impurity exuded by the body, so to speak, is trapped by the roof and cannot rise. Hence, every person and object under the roof is contaminated.”

- *Tabernacle*

Verses 4, 13, and 20 mention the tabernacle. As stated above, the word ‘tabernacle’ refers to the place of God’s presence and it was different from a ‘tent’, which was used as dwelling places of the community in the wilderness.

- *The cleansed person*

Verses 18, 19 refer to the “the cleansed person ” and his task of preparing and applying purification water.

Verse 18: “Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle anyone who has died a natural death.”

The text is specific about who should sprinkle the water. The man who is ceremonially cleansed should be the one to do the sprinkling. He should be different from the unclean man mentioned in the previous verses. The cleansed person should be the one who was not contaminated by death (vv 11, 13, 16-17). This point is elaborated on further in this chapter below.

To perform the cleansing ritual, the cleansed man would take a hyssop branch and dip it into water in a jar. Then he should sprinkle the tent (the dwelling place in which someone died) and all the vessels and the people present in the tent when death occurred (v 14). He should also sprinkle anyone who touched the human body, bone, or a grave, or anyone who was killed by a sword, or has died a natural death (v 18).

- *The washing of clothes and taking a bath*

The text mentions the washing of clothes repeatedly. Apart from becoming unclean by contact of the dead, the participation in the following activities also made people unclean:

1. The priest became unclean by being present at the slaughtering of the red heifer (v 7).

2. The person who burned the heifer became unclean (v 8).
3. The person who gathered the ashes became unclean (v10).
4. The person who sprinkled water with a hyssop branch became unclean because of the contact of the water of cleansing (v 21).

For purity to take place in this case, it was necessary to wash the clothes and take a bath.

- *Unclean for seven days*

Unlike the cleansing of the priest (v7), the following people remain unclean: the person who burned the heifer (v 8), the one who gathered the ashes of the heifer (v 10), and who touched the water of cleansing (v 21) remaining unclean until evening, the person who touched the dead, and a grave remained unclean for seven days (vv 12, 18). This matter is explained further in this chapter.

- *Cleansing took place on the third and seven days*

The cleansing of the person who touched the dead and a grave took place twice on the third and seventh days (v12, 18) of the cleansing week.

- *Touch*

The word “touch” is used repeatedly in the passage. It is mentioned at least in five verses 11, 13, 16, 18, 22.

- *The lasting ordinance*

Verses 10, 21 describe the water of cleansing as lasting ordinance. This term marks the beginning and end of each section of the passage.

- *The priest*

The heifer was to be taken to and slaughtered in the presence of the priest Eleazar. Thereafter he would take its blood and sprinkle it toward the Tent of the Lord (vv3, 4, 6, 7).

- *The blood*

The priest had to take the blood of the heifer and sprinkle it seven times towards the front of the Tent of the Lord (vv3, 5).

- *Cause and effect*

In this passage the cause and effect are as follows:

Cause: the person who has been sprinkled with the water of cleansing ...

Effect: becomes ceremonially clean (vv 17-19).

Cause: the person who refuses the water of cleansing ...

Effect: would be cut off from the community (v 20).

3. *The action and role of God*

God speaks to Moses and Aaron (v1ff), and he (God) provides his people with the water of cleansing.

4. *The actions of people*

The people are commanded to bring the heifer to Eleazar the priest. The cleansed person slaughters the heifer, and the priest is to sprinkle the blood toward the tabernacle seven times. The cleansed person should prepare and apply the water of purification using a hyssop branch (vv 17-19) and he should wash his clothes and have a bath because of touching the water of cleansing (v 21).

5. *The order of with regard to the preparation of water of cleansing*

For the cleansing to take place, God commanded Moses and Aaron to tell the Israelites they should take some ashes from burnt purification, place it into a jar and pour water over it(v 17).

Milgrom (1990: 161) suggests that there are seemingly two texts representing the order of placing and pouring the cleansing agents into a jar. The Bible text's order is "putting the ashes and then pouring water" into a jar. However, the Rabbis hold the view that the order should be "pouring water and then adding ashes to the water". However, it is not clear why the Rabbis posed this reading.

6. *Contrasts*

Two different types of people are contrasted in this passage, the unclean and the cleansed ones. The unclean person (vv 11, 13, 16, 19-22) was not allowed to approach God in worship, for such an individual defiled the tabernacle of the Lord. Moreover, he would be cut off from the community. The cleansed person (vv9, 18-19) who had undergone the cleansing process enjoyed the worship of God and dwelling in the midst of the community.

7. *Conjunctions*

Conjunctions are also helpful to understand a text. Conjunctions in Numbers 19 are listed below.

The conjunction “and” is found in the following sentences and is used to connect sentences. In verse 5 “and” is used to connect parts of a red heifer: hides, flesh, blood and offal that were to be burnt together with the red heifer. It is also used to connect the third and seven and other sentences with verse 19.

The word “but” (v 20) draws a contrast between the person who takes the water of cleansing and becomes clean and the one who does not and remain unclean. The person who declined purification defiled the sanctuary of the Lord (v20). As a result, he was cut off from the Israelite community for this deliberate refusal (vv13, 20). The repeat of the cut off from the Israelite community was to emphasise the defilement (Milgrom, 190: 158-163). That was the case throughout (Nm 15:30-31).

The paragraphs in Numbers 19 do not employ the dialogical structure of questions and answers questions and answers. God speaks to Moses and Aaron to tell the Israelites about the water of cleansing that they should prepare and apply for cleansing purposes.

There is, therefore, no dialogue in the passage. Instead God in the passages uses a monologue in which God speaks to Moses and Aaron.

8. *Purpose statement*

The slaughtering of a red heifer and the use of its ashes, the preparation of the water of cleansing and its application was for the purpose of cleansing.

9. *Means*

God restored his people to true worship by providing the water of cleansing with which they could wash away their uncleanness and become clean again.

10. Conditional clauses:

If the unclean person does not purify him on the third day, then on the seven day he will not be cleansed (v 12).

If they fail to purify themselves after touching a human corpse, they defile the Lord's tabernacle (v 13).

But if those who are unclean do not purify themselves, they must be cut off from the community (v 20).

If anyone wanted to be cleansed, that person would take the water of purification, and anyone who wanted to remain unclean would decline the water of cleansing (v20).

11. Tone

It could be deduced that there was a tone of loving concern for the wellbeing of God's people, but at the same time a threat of being separated from God and from the fellowship of his covenant people – should someone discard this instruction.

3.3.2 Historical context

Cole (2000:301) states correctly that the historical context of the ritual of Numbers 19 is that of the death of 14 700 in the plague that followed the Korah rebellion (Nm.16:36-40). Contact with corpses of nearly 15 000 dead would require a massive application of purification codes. It was because of the death of this mass of people in the wilderness that God ordained and provided this ritual, in order to cleanse everyone who might have touched the dead human bodies intentionally or unintentionally.

Thus, cleansing was required of the Israelites as well as the aliens living among them (vv 2, 10) who touched the corpses. God commanded them to slaughter a heifer that was to be burnt completely and to take its ashes, pour it into a vessel and mix it with water for the cleansing of those unclean persons who touched the dead bodies.

The heifer was not burnt on its own. It was burnt together with substances that were thrown into the fire. These substances were cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool (v 6).

At this point the study endeavours to answer two questions: Firstly, what were these substances? Secondly, why did the scribes throw it into the burning heifer? Firstly the substances will be examined closer.

Cedar wood (ēš 'erēz)

Strong (1996:316) confirms that it was a cedar tree. However, Milgrom (1990:158-163) points out that the scribes and modern scholars believe that this was a cyprus tree, because cedar wood was rare outside of Lebanon. Youngblood (1995:1003) states that the cedar wood is generally understood to be the “juniper” that grew in Sinai.

In light of the versions provided by Milgrom and Youngblood, it can be concluded that the “cedar wood” in this verse is understood differently by different scholars.

Hyssop ('ēzôv)

Butler (1991:682) points out that “a hyssop is a small (approx. 27 inches), bushy plant, probably the *Origanum Maru L*, or Syrian marjoram. Stalks of hyssop bear numerous, small, white flowers in bunches. Hyssop was thus well-suited for use as a brush to dab the lintels of Israelite homes with the blood of the Passover lambs (Ex. 12:22). The psalmist applied it symbolically as a way for cleansing of sin (Ps 57:7).”

Scarlet wool

The Hebrew only reads “scarlet worm” (*šēnî tôlā'at*), which refers to the scarlet colour originating from a specific organism. The scarlet material alluded to here can be of wool or any yarn. The scarlet colour should not be confused with “red”, for which Hebrew has a separate word, and which is usually associated with blood.

The above-mentioned substances were used in this way because they usually were associated with cleansing ceremonies. For example, they were used in the cleansing of the lepers (Lv 16:4, 6) and the cleansing of a house that had mildew (Lv 14:49, 51-52). Moreover, the hyssop alone was used to dab the blood on the doorpost of the Israelites' houses (Ex. 12:22) and to sprinkle water (Nm 19:18; Ps. 57:7).

In referring to these purification substances Keil and Delitzsch (1996:733-738) points out that “cedar wood was a symbol of the incorruptible continuance of life; hyssop, the symbol of purification from the corruption of death; and scarlet wool, as the deep red of

which shadowed forth the strongest vital energy (14:6), so that the ashes might be regarded as the quintessence of all that purified and strengthened life, refined and sublimated by the fire.”

Milgrom (1990:158-163) draws attention to the fact that “the same materials (cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson stuff) were used in the purification of a leper (Lv 14:4, 6, 49, 51-52) and in other purification rituals across the ancient Near East. For example, in the Mesopotamian ritual “When Covering the Temple Kettle-Drum”, the bull (of which the hide was to become the drum skin) was sprinkled with cedar balsam, burned with cedar wood, and buried in a red cloth.”

3.3.2.1 Audience

The law regarding the water of cleansing in Numbers 19 was directed both to the Israelites and the strangers living among them (vv 2, 10):

This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke.

The man who gathers up the ashes of the heifer must also wash his clothes, and he too will be unclean till evening. This will be a last ordinance both for the Israelites and for the aliens living among them.

3.3.2.1.1 The Israelites

Whenever the passage mentions the Israelites (vv 2, 10, 13) it refers to the historical twelve tribes of Israel that wandered in the wilderness, and, by implication, their descendants. God gave the burning of the red heifer as ordinance to Israel and their descendants (v 2).

3.3.2.1.2 The strangers

The law of cleansing was also directed to aliens or strangers who were living among the people of Israel (v 10).

De Vaux (1961:74) points out that the Israelite population included the resident aliens. From a social point of view, these resident aliens were free people and thus different from slaves. However, they did not have civil rights. They were hired for their services (Dt 24:14). Even as aliens they, therefore, were under the protection of God (Dt 10:18).

They were to share in the tithe offerings collected every third year (Dt 14:29). God commanded the Israelites to care for the aliens living among them (Lv 19:34).

Beck (2013:266) argues that the Israelites were landowners, and that the stranger or alien was someone who did not own land. Such a person thus either had to hire from a landowner, or rely on uncertain access to public land (Gn 15:13; Dt 24:14). Beck continues to stress that these strangers, who were living among the Israelites, had to practise circumcision before they could enter the worship festivals and offer sacrifices to God (Ex 12:48; Lv 16:29; 17:8; Nm 9:14; 15:13-15). They shared the same responsibilities with Israel by also having to avoid eating blood, and also had to perform cleansing rituals after they had contact with the deceased (Nm 19). These facts underscore the comprehensiveness of the instructions given in Numbers 19.

From the above it is evident that the mentioned law of cleansing was a law directed exclusively in that context to Israel and all the strangers who lived among them. That law, therefore, does not include the believers of the new covenant. It was limited to the audience as explicated above. The AICs, therefore cannot include themselves in these directions. It do not apply to the modern church. Moreover, Christ came so that the believers in the new covenant are no longer bound by such cleansing rituals. However, the principle behind this law is still relevant to believers today: holiness. Through Christ, those who belong to Him can live a holy live.

3.3.2.2 The purpose of the ritual

The purpose of the cleansing ritual from Numbers 19 is twofold: to teach the Israelites and strangers about the purity and holiness of God, and to preserve this revelation and instruction for the future generations (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1990:137). The purpose of the ritual as stated by Pfeiffer and Harrison is supported by an exposition of the pericope itself. The unclean were not allowed to approach the holy God in worship or come nearby his sanctuary; they were prevented to enter to the sanctuary and, instead, were cut off from the Israelite community (vv 13, 20). Therefore, the ashes for the rituals were kept outside the camp for future use. This does indicate that this ritual was preserves as a revelation and instruction for the future generations (v 9). It also states that the cleansing ritual will be a “perpetual statute” (vv 10, 21), which indicates that it is for the future generation as well.

In addition to Pfeiffer and Harrison it is important to take into consideration that in the ritual God revealed his love and care for his people by providing them a way to maintain their fellowship with him and enjoy his presence in the Tabernacle. God gave them the water of purification mixed with the ashes of the red heifer for a cleansing ceremony whenever they touched dead bodies. This helped to restore them in their relationship to God and enable them to keep on reflecting God's holiness. In addition, the cleansing ritual was provided by God to remove and purify the Israelites from their incidental uncleanness (v 9).

3.3.3 Literary context

The previous chapters 16:35, 48, 17, 18 serve as the literary context for Numbers 19. In the overall structure of the Book of Numbers, the literary context of the rituals prescribed in Numbers 19, is that of the death of 14 700 people in the plague that followed the Korah rebellion (16:36-40). Contact with the dead or mere proximity to the bodies of the nearly 15 000 corpses would require a massive purification exercise.

Keil and Delitzsch (1996:733-738) points out that, after God had killed the large section of the whole nation as the result of the rebellion of Korah and his company, God gave his people this command to apply the water of cleansing. This was done in order to keep God's relationship with his people intact. Seeing that decaying corpses discharge, the natural bodily discharges are reminders of sin and death. Therefore, purification rituals symbolise movement from death towards life and, accordingly, involved blood, the colour red, and spring (literal "living") water, all of which are symbols of life (Lv 17:11; 14:5, 50; Nm 19:2, 17, etc.). First of all the preparation of the sprinkling water is commanded to remove this uncleanness (vv 1-10a); and the use of this purifying water is directed as an eternal statute (10b-22).

3.3.4 Immediate context

The immediate context (vv 14-15) implies the ceremonial uncleanness due to the death of a person in a tent, the vessels of which the lids were open when death occurred. The context is also extended to those who were killed by the sword in the field, and those who touched the human body of the deceased (v 16). The cleansing water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer (vv 17-19) was to be sprinkled by a clean person on the unclean one whose condition is described by the previous verses (vv 14, 15) on the

third and seven days. This fact is also confirmed by verse 18. Verse 20 refers to the punishment of being cut off from the community that will come as a result of neglecting this purification.

3.3.5 The literary genre

The genre of the whole chapter entails law texts. This is evident from the language forms used, namely imperatives. In most cases apodictic laws are given (“you shall/shall not”), but there are also instances of case laws (“if ... then”), such as in Leviticus 19:14. Some injunctions are covert case laws, where circumstances are sketched that make certain rituals necessary (such as in v 13). Hill and Walton (1991:74-75) discuss these subgenres of law.

Keil and Delitzsch (1996:733-338) term this type of law “statute of instruction,” or “law-statute”, as stated in verse 2: *hūqqat-hattorâ*. He points out that this combination of the two words is commonly used for law and statute, which is found again in Numbers 31:21. In this case it is also, as in Numbers 19, used in connection with a rule about purification from the uncleanness of death. The term *hūqqat-hattorâ* is probably intended to highlight the design and importance of the law about to be given.

3.3.6 Literary structure

3.3.6.1 The outline of the Book

For a wider context, it is necessary to understand the literature structure of Numbers 19 as a unit. Hill and Walton (1991:132) outline the Book of Numbers as follows:

I. Preparations for the departure from Sinai

- A. Numbering and organization of the tribes (1-4)
- B. Special legislation (5-6)
- C. Tribal offerings for the tabernacle (7)
- D. Purification of the Levites (8)
- E. Passover (9:1-14)
- F. The cloud of guidance and silver trumpets (9:15-10:10)

II. From Sinai to Kadesh

- A. Arrangement of the tribes marching (10:11-36)
- B. Grumbling and unrest (11:1-15)

- C. God's provision of food (11:16-35)
- D. Insubordination of Aaron and Miriam (12)
- E. The twelve spies (13-14)
- F. Supplemental laws (15)
- G. Rebellion of Korah and others (16-17)
- H. Duties of priests and Levites (18)
- I. Purification ritual for the unclean (19)
- J. Miriam's death and Moses' sin (20:1-21).

III. From Kadesh to the plains of Moab

- A. Aaron's death (20:22-29)
- B. Defeat of Arad, Sihon, and Og (21)
- C. Balak and Balam (22-24)
- D. Israel's idolatry and immorality at Baal-Peor (25)
- E. Second numbering of Israel (26)
- F. Inheritance case of Zelophehad's daughter, part 1 (27:1-11)
- G. Selection of Joshua as Moses' successor (27:12-23)
- H. Additional legislation on offerings and vows (28-30)
- I. War against Midian (31)
- J. The Transjordan tribes (32)
- K. Itinerary of Israel of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan (33:1-49)
- L. Allotment of Transjordan lands (33:50-34:29)
- M. Levitical cities and cities of refuge (35)
- N. Inheritance case of Zelophehad's daughter, part 2 (36)."

3.3.6.2 The structure of Numbers 19:1-22

Cole (2000:303) indicates how scholars traditionally have divided the chapter into two distinct movements, with the first focusing on the ritual methods regarding the sacrifice of the heifer and the nature of its ashes (vv 1-10); and the second focusing on the application of the ashes in the procedures for the ritual purification (vv 11-22).

Cole continues by referring to later research and analysis by Milgrom who has observed that literary analysis, evidences a *bifid* or "binary" structure, with the break in the text between verses 13 and 14, and each section beginning with the phrase "this is the law"

(*zō`ṭ ḥūqqat hattôrâ*, “this is the statute of law”); in vers 2a, and *zō`ṭ hattôrâ*, “this is the law” in verse 14a):

Table 4-13: The structure of Numbers 19:1-22 (1)

Panel A (19:2a-13)	Panel B (19:14-22)
<i>“This is the ritual law” (19:2)</i>	<i>“This is the ritual” (19:14)</i>
<i>Preparing the ashes</i>	<i>Touching corpse or its derivatives</i>
<i>Renders impure (19:2b-10)</i>	<i>Renders impure (19:14-16)</i>
<i>Purification procedure (19:11-12)</i>	<i>Purification procedure (19:17-19)</i>
<i>Penalty for non-purification (19:13)</i>	<i>Penalty for non-purification (19:20)</i> <i>“Law for all time” (19:21a)</i> <i>[Addition (21b-22)]</i>

A further parallel can be pointed out in the concluding statements about the penalty for failure to keep the ritual requirements:

Table 4-24: The structure of Numbers 19:1-22 (2)

Panel A (19:2-13)	Panel B (19:14-22)
<i>“... does not cleanse himself defiles the Lord’s tabernacle that person will be cut off from Israel Since the water of purification was not dashed on him he remains unclean” (v 13)</i>	<i>“... fails to cleanse himself that person will be cut off from the congregation for he has defiled the Lord’s sanctuary The water of purification was not dashed on him he is unclean” (v 20)</i>

Cole (2002:304) then convincingly argues that several *chiastic* patterns are evident in both the micro- and macro-structures of this chapter, which both enhance the literary flavour of the material and contribute to the particular emphases made.

This literary structure is helpful in providing an overview of the context of Numbers 19.

- It indicates that the ritual was ordered around the time when numerous human corpses were lying around the Israelites, making it easy for them to touch or be in its proximity. Therefore, the ritual of the water cleansing was extremely important and urgent.
- It points out the location in which the water of cleansing was given, namely in Kadesh, within the desert of Paran.
- It provides insight into the events preceding and following Numbers 19 and help interpret this passage within its context.

3.3.7 Analysis of key words and terms

Complex religious and theological symbolism is conveyed by the system of purity and impurity, though unfortunately in most cases the symbolism is implicit rather than explicit. In efforts to understand the meaning of elements prescribed and the meaning of key words and terms, the interpreter must compare the details and the interpretation the text provides, with the same terms in other texts in the Pentateuch and even the rest of the Old Testament. This will help the interpreter reconstruct the conceptual world of the purity/impurity system.

3.3.7.1 A heifer

In the structure of the passage (Nm 19:2-10, NIV) the term “heifer” can be traced as follows.

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: (2) This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: tell the Israelites to bring you **a red heifer** without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. (3) Give **it** to Eleazar the priest; **it** is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. (4) Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of **its** blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting. (5) While he watches, **the heifer** is to be burnt: its hide, flesh, blood and offal.*

*(6) The priest is to take some cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool and throw them onto **the burning heifer**. (7) After that, the priest must wash his clothes and bath himself with water. (8) The man who burns **it** must also wash his clothes and bath with water, and he too will be unclean till evening. (9) A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of **the heifer** and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is water for purification. (10) The man who gathers up the ashes of **the heifer** must also wash his clothes, and he too will be unclean till evening. This will be a lasting ordinance both for the Israelites and for the aliens living among them.*

The passage presents in different ways the word with the same meaning for the cleansing animal “a red heifer”, “the heifer”, “the burning heifer”, and a pronoun (“it”), and possessive pronoun (“its”).

A heifer (*pārâ*) that was slaughtered was not merely an old cow as some researchers contend. Keil and Delitzsch (1996:733-738) are correct to point out that it was a young cow, in the phase between a calf and a full-grown cow – indicated by the feminine form of the noun.

Several reasons have been pointed out why a female offering was chosen, of which the two prominent ones are as follows:

- Elwell (1995:70, cf. also Keil and Delitzsch 1996:733-738) surmise that the animal was to be a female, because the female brings forth and gives life.
- Cole (2000:306) points out that the choosing of a female animal was to ensure that there would be no confusion about the difference between a sin offering that was sacrificed for the high priest and his family (Lv 4:3-12; 16:6, 11), or on behalf of the community as a whole (Lv 4:13-21), and the mentioned ritual that had a different meaning.

Having stated the reasons above, it should be clear that the text doesn't provide clarity on the reason for the gender of the offering, but that both reasons provided above are plausible.

3.3.7.2 Without defect or blemish

A closer analysis of verse 2 highlights the following specification:

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: (2) This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer **without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke.***

As the passage points out, the selected heifer had to be (1) without defect or blemish, and (2) one that has never been under a yoke. The animal selected for the cleansing ritual was to be a “red” (*ădūmmāh*) heifer “without defect” (*těmîmâ*) and “wherein there is no blemish” (*’ēn-bāh mûm*). Other translations refer to a perfect red heifer that is spotless.

Milgrom (1990:158-163) cites the rabbis who interpret “without defect” or “blemish” as referring to the colour: “unblemished red”. Red was indeed a symbol of blood and life in that context (Sprinkle, 2000:637). Milgrom’s interpretation seems plausible if it is considered that God provided gracious hope for the Israelites who must have been devastated after the death of almost 15 000 people due to the rebellion led by Korah.

Keil and Delitzsch (1996:733-738) point out that the mentioning of the red colour (*ădūmmâ*), is not to be confused with *těmîmâ* in the sense of “quite red” as the Rabbis interpret it. Rather *těmîmâ* is to be read as such, and the words that follow, “wherein is no blemish”, to be regarded as defining the term more precisely (Lv 22:20).

Keil and Delitzsch (1996:733-738) are correct in arguing that Leviticus 22 defines the quality of the animal more precisely. For instance, verses 17-33 provide the more precise definition of “without defect or blemish”, where “blemish” implies an animal that is blind, injured or maimed, or has warts or sores, is deformed, or stunted, or its private parts are crushed, torn or cut (Lv 22:22-25). In a cross-reference, Malachi 1:6-14 describes God as angry with Israel because they offered animals that are “defect or blemished” – meaning that the animals were blind, crippled or had diseases (Mal 1:7). The rabbis cited by Milgrom (1990:158-163), do not take into consideration these other occurrences in their interpretation of verse 2.

To conclude: By these specific instructions, Israel is taught that God cannot be worshipped in a careless way. Careless worship is unacceptable since it utterly fails to come to terms with God’s greatness and does not reflect total commitment to God.

3.3.7.3 The heifer that was never been under the yoke

Further analysis of verse 2 indicates an additional specification.

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: (2) This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and **that has never been under a yoke.***

In addition to the animal without defect or blemish, as the passage points out, the Israelites had to select an animal “that has never been under the yoke”.

Among other things heifers were used for ploughing, as is described in Deuteronomy 21:3. Therefore, a heifer that has not been under a yoke, means that it was not used for ploughing, which implies a young cow. In addition, by offering the best, an unused and not a “second-hand” animal, Israel had to reflect on the fact that they give their “utmost for God’s highest”.

3.3.7.4 Outside the camp

Unlike other sacrifices, which could be slaughtered inside the camp at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (17:1-5), the red heifer was to be slaughtered outside the camp (v 3). In specifying *where* outside the camp, Milgrom (1990:158-163) points out that the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX) of “outside the camp” adds “in a clean place” as an essential criterion for the offering of burnt purification (Lv 1:16; 4:12).

Seume elaborates on why the sacrifice had to take place outside the camp: “The sacrifice was made outside the camp not because it is saturated with sin but because it is too holy a sacrifice to be made inside the camp of the world or of Judaism where men dwell” (Seume, 1942:51). However, the text does not provide the reason why God chose the area outside the camp for the slaughtering of the red heifer.

To find meaning in the instruction that the slaughtering had to be done “outside the camp”, it is helpful to consider other references in the Pentateuch (e.g. Lv 4:12, 13; 13:46; 16:27-28; Nm 5:3, 4; 12:14, 15; 15:35, 36).

The area outside the camp seemingly was associated with a place of uncleanness. In that area the refuse and dung were dumped and the unclean lepers had to live.

Therefore, it was considered as the place of sin and evil, as well as shame and uncleanness.

In light of these considerations, the flesh and skin of the animals, on which the sins of God's people have been transferred symbolically, had to be burnt outside the camp or city. Only the blood of the sacrificed animals signifying its lives were taken into the Tabernacle and later the Temple – into the Holy Of Holies – and sprinkled on the alter. This was done to symbolise that God forgives and cleanses his people from all their sin and shame, and accepts and gives them dignity since their sins have been cleansed by the blood of the sacrificed animals. The burning up of the hides, flesh and offal of the animals outside the camp symbolised that God has destroyed, and fully taken away the sins of his people.

3.3.7.5 **Take (lāqah)**

From a further analysis of the passage, the function of the word “take” stands out.

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: (2) This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. (3) Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be **taken** outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. (4) Then Eleazar the priest is to **take** some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting. (5) While he watches, the heifer is to be burnt: its hide, flesh, blood and offal. (6) The priest is to **take** some cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool and throw them onto the burning heifer.*

*(17) And for an unclean person they shall **take** of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel (KJV).*

*(18) Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to **take** some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishing and the people who were there*

Cole (2000:301) is correct to assert that the term “take” should be considered the key word in the passage (vv 3, 4, 6, 17, 18). The use of this word also links chapter 19 to previous chapters 16-17 since it often appears, for example, in 16:6: *You Korah, and all your followers are to do this: **Take** censers and tomorrow put fire and incense in them*

before the LORD's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them, (see also: Nm 16:7, 15, 17-18, 37, 39, 46-47; 17:2, 9, 10; 18:6– KJV).

This single word is important in this context, seeing that it highlights the actions to be taken for the cleansing ritual to happen. For example, it was necessary that the heifer should be taken outside the camp before it was slaughtered (v 3). Eleazar had to “take” the blood of the heifer before he could sprinkle it seven times towards the Tent of Meeting (v 4). It was also necessary to “take” the purification substances: cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool and burn it with the burning heifer (v 6). For the cleansing ceremony to happen, it was necessary to “take” the ashes, pour it into a vessel or jar and then mix it with water before the clean person could sprinkle the cleansing water on the unclean people (vv 17-18).

3.3.7.6 The ashes of the heifer

On the issue of the heifer's ashes, an analysis of the passage highlights the following:

*(9) A man who is clean shall gather up the **ashes** of the heifer and put **them** in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. **They** shall be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is water for purification. (10) The man who gathers up the **ashes** of the heifer must also wash his clothes, and he too will be unclean till evening. This will be a lasting ordinance both for the Israelites and for the aliens living among them. (17) For the unclean person, put some **ashes** from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them.*

It becomes clear from the highlighted words that a ceremonially clean man was to be responsible for the collection of the ashes (v 9). This cleansed person may refer to someone else than Eleazar the high priest, as Milgrom (1990:158-163) points out: this man did not necessarily have to be a priest. This opinion is also shared by Pfeiffer and Harrison (1990:137) who finds from his study of the passage that any clean person could perform this rite; it did not require a priest. The text does not mention a person's name, as it is confirmed (Milgrom, 1990: 158-163; Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1990: 137).

An important fact to keep in mind is that the ashes of the heifer was mixed with the ashes of cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool as these substances were thrown into the fire to burn together with the heifer (v 6).

The ashes were carefully collected by a ritually clean person into a clean vessel and stored in a clean location outside the camp for safe-keeping. The Israelite community kept these ashes for future use and application (v 9) in the cleansing water. The term translated with “kept” (*mišmeret*) may have a more emphatic meaning in this context, namely of “safeguarding service” similar to the usage in Nm 3:28-38 and 4:27-32. Those responsible for the task would ensure that the purifying ashes were carefully stored in a clean locale, and guarded against any contamination that would render it useless for future application.

These ashes were put into a jar and fresh water poured over it (v 15). Thereafter, a person who is ceremonially clean was to take a branch of hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people in the tent or house when death occurred. The cleansing also included those who touched the human bone, or grave or physically touched someone who has been killed or who has died a natural death (vv 17-18). In this regard, Henry (1999:215) points out that the ashes of this single heifer were sufficient to be used in as multiple vessels of water as the people of Israel would need for many ages. Milgrom (1990:158-163) explains that during the Second Temple period, these ashes were divided into three parts: one third for sprinkling, one third for sanctifying new lustral (consecrated) water, and one third for safekeeping.

When taking the broader context of the Pentateuch into consideration, it is also important to remember that the symbolic system as a whole served to separate YHWH-worshipping from necromancy, spiritualism, and ancestor veneration, since dealings with the dead caused that person to be unclean (cf. Lv 19:31 according to which consulting spiritualists renders such a person morally “unclean”). In Deuteronomy 18:9-14 people who are involved with necromancy (communicating with the spirits of the deceased) are called “an abomination to the LORD”.

Thus the full ritual described in Numbers 19 was also meant as a way to establish Israel’s identity as the people who belong to YHWH and not to the pagan nations and gods around them. Even sitting among the graves (Is 65:4) meant condemnation.

3.3.7.7 **Water of cleansing**

The water of cleansing as is referred to repeatedly in verses 9, 13, 20, and 21, entails a mixture of fresh water and the ashes of the red heifer. This water was used to cleanse

those who were considered ceremonially unclean by touching either a human bone, grave, dead body, or by entering a tent or house where someone had died (vv 11-21).

Achtemeier (1985:1121-1122) points out that the water of cleansing or purification is the liquid used in ancient purification rituals to cleanse the subject from the defilement “incurred by coming into close contact with human death, either by touching a human” bone, a grave, or a corpse, or by entering a tent where someone had died. This had to be done on the third and seventh day after the defilement. After bathing and washing their clothes the individuals would then be considered clean and acceptable within the community again. The mixture of water and ashes would also be sprinkled on the tent and its furnishings if death had occurred within the tent (Nm 19:1-22; 31:21-24).

Wenham (2003:1, 112) points out that death, as in Leviticus, causes the worst form of uncleanness. Those who come near to God must be free of all pollution. However, in the previous chapters the narrative recounted how people from every walk of life had died, and the whole community been polluted. It is then possible to deal with such pollution by offering a sin offering (see Lv 4), but such a means is usually expensive and complicated. Therefore, in Numbers 19 an instant sin offering is provided instead. By burning a red cow, cedar-wood, hyssop, and scarlet yarn, all of which have atoning properties, special ash is created. When mixed with fresh water, another cleansing agent, the ash had to be sprinkled on people. This was to purify them from pollution by a corpse, and in the same vein symbolise God’s mercy, forgiveness and cleansing as victory over sin and death.

3.3.7.8 Purification offering

The ashes used in the water of cleansing was a “sin offering” (*ḥattâṭ* – vv 9, 17). The purification offering is translated as “purification from sin” in other translations such as NKJV, NASB, and NIV.

Pfeiffer and Harrison (1990:137) assert that this cleansing ritual is called a “sin offering” because the life of a pure and innocent victim was substituted for the life of the one who was defiled. According to Milgrom (1990:162) this also entails purification offering. Verse 9 states: “It is a *ḥattâṭ*.” The antecedent “it” (read as feminine) is technically “the cow” (*pārâ*) according to the *qērē*, in other words, the text that the Masorete considered

to be read. However, the consonantal text (the *kēṭiv*, i.e. what is written) has the masculine form, which would refer to “ashes” (*’ēfer*) which contains the ritual detergent.

When understanding this as a purification offering as well, this passage holds the additional meaning that YHWH provided a sign according to which He purifies his people from the condemnation and punishment of death, and opens a way to life in fellowship with Him.

3.3.7.9 The period of uncleanness

According to the directives in Numbers 19, the uncleanness of a priest (v 7), the man who burns the heifer (v 8), the man who gathers up the ashes (v 10), the man who touches the water of cleansing (v 21), and anyone who touched anything the unclean person touched (v 22), lasted until evening. This one day period of uncleanness is also applicable to anyone who touched the carcass and uncleanness caused by discharges (Lv 11: 24, 27, 39; 15). However, in other cases the uncleanness lasted seven days. Anyone who touched a corpse was considered ritually unclean for seven days (vv 11, 14, 16). If someone died in a tent, anyone who was in a tent, or enters a tent, was seen as ritually unclean for seven days (v 14). If anyone touched a person who has been killed or has died a natural death in the field, or touched a human bone or a grave, that person was considered ritually unclean for seven days (v 16).

Anyone who touched a corpse was considered ritually unclean for seven days (vv 11, 14, 16). If someone died in a tent, anyone who was in a tent, or enters a tent, was seen as ritually unclean for seven days (v 14). If anyone touched a person who has been killed or has died a natural death in the field, or touched a human bone or a grave, that person was considered ritually unclean for seven days (v 16).

The period of uncleanness hold implications for the ritual of the AICs, according to which the family members are considered ritually unclean for seven days after attending the funeral. They are not allowed to attend church services for seven days and regard themselves as ritually unclean during that period.

For the mentioned period of seven days, the unclean Israelite and alien had to stay separated from the community and cut off from the sanctuary of God. This symbolises the understanding of God’s holiness’ and how sin will always hinder us from having a fellowship with God.

The implication also is that the uncleanness incurred by touching of a corpse was similar to the uncleanness of a woman during her menstrual period. For a woman who was ritually unclean, due to menstruation, was to remain ritually unclean for seven days (Lv 15:19). The same applied to a man who had sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period – he had to remain unclean for seven days as well (Lv 15:24). The directives also include the situation when a child was born – the mother’s uncleanness lasted for seven days when it was a boy (Lv 12:1-2). She would wait for thirty three days to be purified from her bleeding (Lv 12:4).

3.3.7.10 Days on which cleansing should take place

According to the directives in Numbers 19, those considered unclean had to be sprinkled twice, on the third and seventh days of the week, because of their condition (vv 11, 12, 19). This indicated the thoroughness and seriousness of this ritual in the mentioned context.

As was indicated, the AICs base their practice on this phrase “on the third and seven days”. Then they practise the cleansing ceremony of *ishumi lamanga* (on the tenth day after the funeral). When the directives prescribe that the cleansing should take place on the third and on the seventh day (v 11, 12, 19) members of the AICs understand this to mean that ceremony should take place on the tenth day, by adding seven to three days ($3+7= 10$), which calculates to ten days. They assume the tenth day as the day on which the cleansing ceremony of *ishumi lamalanga* should take place.

The seventh-day period of uncleanness appears similar to the period prescribed for the Nazirites who had become unclean through contact with the dead (Nm 6:9) and for those suffering from various skin diseases such as leprosy (Lv 13:5; 14:9; 15:13).

The fact that the cleansing ceremony had to take place on the third and seventh days, demonstrate that the impurity of contamination by a corpse was seen as severe. Instead of only one day, it needed two days of cleaning.

3.3.7.11 Ceremonially clean

When following Numbers 19, for anyone to be considered ceremonially clean, the water of cleansing had to be applied to that person by way of sprinkling (vv 16-19). On the seventh day the subject had to wash his/her clothes and take a bath (v 19). On the

evening of the seventh day of the cleansing week the subject was then declared clean (v 19).

Any person who refuses to take the water of cleansing and be sprinkled with it, were to remain outside the camp, to prevent him/her from defiling the sanctuary of the Lord (v 20). Uncleaness and the danger it held, were a constant threat for those who did not take the necessary steps to be purified (Nm 19:12-13; Lv 17:16). An unclean person, for example, was not allowed to celebrate the Passover while he/she was unclean (Nm 9:613).

In the context of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness, an Israelite who became unclean was to go "outside the camp," which is, away from the Tabernacle where the Lord dwelt among them (Nm 5:3). In this way such a person was separated from God and his covenant people.

3.3.7.12 To sprinkle/the sprinkling

Regarding the sprinkling of water (vv 17-19), Cole (2000:301) reports that the purification procedures involved a three-stage process: making the purification mixture, sprinkling of the unclean person, and cleansing the one who performs the purification ritual. The person performing the ceremonial cleansing or decontamination process must simply be ritually clean himself. This does not necessarily involve the application or oversight by a priest, who usually was needed as attendant in the process of preparation of the ashes. The mixture of ashes with the red cow, hyssop, cedar, and crimson wool, were placed in a bowl. Thereafter, fresh (lit. "living," *ḥayyim*) water was added to the mixture, creating a muddy-looking emulsion. The agent would then take some leaves of marjoram, dip it into the mixture, and sprinkle it on the following: the tent's exterior and interior; the open vessels that had been rendered unclean; people who were in the tent when the person died as well as those who entered afterwards; and/or on the person who has come into contact with a dead body in a field.

The manner of sprinkling is emphasised: how the water should be distributed over the items to be cleansed by moving the arm and hand. This action is highlighted by the fourfold use of the preposition *'al* ("upon"), which is then followed by the fourfold list of the exterior contaminating contacts. Two Hebrew terms are used to describe the distribution of the purification water over the unclean person or objects. These terms are

used in verses 13, 18, 19, 20 in a chiastic structure, which emphasises how the sprinkling should be done. In the order below the order is noticeable, where the term *zōraq* is used for the sprinkling process in the exclusionary cases because of

noncompliance, and *hizzâ* is used in the case of active sprinkling for purification:

This structure adds further emphasis on the need to carry out the ritual sprinkling

v 13 *zōraq*: “sprinkling”, exclusion because the waters were not “poured/sprinkled” on the unclean;

v 18 *hizzâ*: purification by “sprinkling” the waters on people and objects;

v 19 *hizzâ*: purification by “sprinkling” the waters on the third and seventh days;

v 20 *zōraq*: “sprinkling,” exclusion of defiled persons by not having water “poured/sprinkled” on them.

procedures. Presumably the “unclean vessels” that were purified in the process would then be washed to complete their purification.

The order of the exterior elements according to verse 18, repeating those from verse 16, creates another simple chiastic construction as follows: A B C D:D B A C:

A pierced	B dead	C bone	D grave
C bone	A pierced	B dead	D grave

The mere fact that sprinkling was also used to cleanse the house that had mildew (Lv 14:51-52), indicates that the uncleanness that occurred by touching the dead was as unclean as a house with mildew. Therefore this uncleanness had to be cleansed and removed as certain as the case of the house with a mildew.

In the Old Testament sprinkling involves the use of blood, water, or oil (Ex 24:8; Lv 1:5, 11; 3:2; 8:30, 14:16; Hb 9:13; 11:28; Nm 19:21; Ez 36:25). Linked to the sacrificial system, sprinkling of blood took place during sacrifices and in consecration of the priesthood, as well that of garments and vessels. Sprinkling could be done with a sprinkler, the finger, or in handfuls (Ex 24:68; Nm 19:13; Ex 29:21). Youngblood asserts on this regard, “Sprinkling signified that an impurity had been recognized and then

cleansed” (Youngblood, *et al.*, 1986:1200). His view is underscored by the fact that cleansing water is not applied unless uncleanness is recognised. This sprinkling of water serves as a clear indication that the contact with the corpse or human body was indeed causing serious uncleanness for anyone who has touched the body or a bone of the dead.

The message for biblical readers

Having studied the passage as indicated above, the message for the original audience was that God wanted his people to know that he is holy. Therefore, for them to approach him in worship and keep their fellowship with him, they had to be holy like him. For his people to be clean they had to use the water of cleansing, which God provided, after they had contact with the dead.

3.4 The differences between the biblical readers and the contemporary readers

The Israelites lived according to the old covenant, which compelled them to perform the cleansing rituals (Nm 19). Because God is holy, they had to serve him with holiness. However, they had to express this holiness by avoiding contact with anything regarded as unholy: the dead, a grave, bones, etcetera. Touching these items made the person ceremonially unclean, and to be ceremonially clean again, requires washing with cleansing water mixed with ashes of a red heifer.

This type of cleanness restored the Israelites to holiness and to the worship of God. The Israelites had to slaughter and sacrifice a red heifer and pour its ashes in the water of purification for a cleansing ceremony.

Christians, however, live according to the new covenant which was sealed by the blood of Christ, as is explained in Matthew 26:26-28:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave it to his disciples saying ‘Take and eat; this is my blood. Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them saying ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Christians do not become ceremonially unclean by touching the dead as was the case with the Israelites, seeing that the latter live under the new covenant of the church.

Unlike the Israelites, Christians are not bound by the ceremonial law of Numbers 19. It was fulfilled in Christ: “The blood of Christ cleanses us from sin” (Hb 9:13-14).

Moreover, Christians do not have to slaughter animals and use its blood and ashes mixed with water as a means of obtaining holiness. Christ as the Lamb of God is a sufficient offering (1 Jn 1: 29).

3.5 General theological principles

Numbers 19 presents at least three clear principles that present-day Christians share with the Israelites:

Firstly: The passage concerns the holiness of God. By means of the ritual God wanted his people to understand his holiness and to be holy themselves, which means to be totally committed to God and his service. God desires of his people to be holy because he saved them and want them to be a testimony to the pagan nations around them. He provides a way for his people to be sanctified. Believers are also holy, because God has saved them through Christ.

Secondly: The passage also touches on death. Death should be seen as God’s way of punishing those who rebel against him and disobey his instructions for an existence committed to him.

Thirdly: The purification ceremony proclaims God’s amazing love, forgiveness and care for his covenant people. God should have destroyed them because of their rebellion and sin. However, He rather provides a way in which there relationship with him can be restored in fellowship with God’s covenant people and be cleansed from the curse of death. By reading this passage in the light of the New Testament, the core of the Gospel of God’s redemption from sin and death is pictured in a way that may provide hope and comfort for his people who have come face to face with the reality of death in that context.

3.6 Application of the theological principles for contemporary readers

As was indicated, the cleansing ritual is about holiness, and God provides this holiness. Thus it should also be clear that God’s aim with the ritual was to confirm to the Israelites

that God provides a way to be reconciled to him, accepted by him have access to him in his holiness.

Having stated that, it becomes clear that the cleansing ritual is no longer needed and applicable to present-day believers. The need for holiness was fulfilled on the believers' behalf through Christ. God accepted believers in Christ, He provided holiness to them in and through the blood of Christ and thereafter enables them to live a holy life, because believers are not only cleansed on the outside but from within in their hearts and conscience (Hb 9:13).

The cleansing ritual also conveys the message that death reminds humans of God's serious punishment over disobedience, rebellion (e.g. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in the chapters preceding Nm 19) and sin. Touching a corpse brought about association with death and God's serious punishment. In the ritual the Israelites were given a way to be reminded of God's mercy and grace for sinners who actually deserved death.

God reminds his people of the principle that He "does not have any pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his way and live" (Ez 18:23).

Regarding present-day believers, this principle is more powerfully fulfilled in Christ who died that we can live when they trust in him. They have the assurance that their death is now no longer a punishment, but a passage to eternal life. Through Christ believers do not need ceremonial cleansing just because they have gone to the *esikhalweni* (mourning service). Through Christ they do not need ceremonial cleansing just because they have done *ukuhlalisa umndeni oshonelwe* (living together with the bereaved) during the morning period.

Because of Christ believers do not need to perform ceremonial cleansing just because they have touched the body of the dead during a car accident, or when they undress and dress the corpse at mortuary or at home. They are no longer defiled by touching a human dead body. The sacrifice of Christ brought about total purification; Christ cleansed those who belong to him as a part of the work of the high priest and his blood cleanses believers from sin (1 Jn 1:7).

A person is defiled by what comes out of his or her heart (Mt 15:1-20). Moreover, Christ has cleansed believers by his word (Jn. 15:3). Because of Christ they do not have to

sprinkle the bed of the dead before they could use it themselves, or sprinkle the clothes of the dead before they may wear it. Due to Christ present-day believers, for example those in the AICs' funerals are not cleansing ceremonies anymore, but seed planting ceremonies (1 Cr 15:35-58). In addition, as a result of Christ's redemption, believers do not perform ceremonial cleansing just because their home has been accidentally visited by a widow.

To conclude this section, the researcher concurs with the view of Sprinkle (2000:657):

As one approaches the new covenant, in one sense the idea of sacred space has been abolished along with the purity laws. The temple, though still utilized in the book of Acts by the early Christians (Ac 2:46; 3:1; 5:21, etc.), was doomed to destruction (Mt 24:2), a fact that anticipates a new day in which emphasis on that sacred space would by necessity be abolished. Similarly, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that what is essential for worship will henceforth not be a particular sacred space, but a sacred heart attitude, worshiping God "in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:21–24). Instead of a tabernacle in the wilderness symbolizing God's dwelling among his people, in the new covenant Christ's tabernacle is among us (Jn 1:14), so wherever two or three gather in his name, there he is in our midst (Mt 18:20). Whereas the purity/impurity laws symbolized both sacred space (land, temple) and sacred community (Israelites, priests), under the new covenant sacred space has been supplanted by sacred community. The sharp division between "clean" Israelites and "unclean" Gentiles has broken down as indicated by the breakdown, under the new covenant, of the clean/unclean system for food, persons, and space that these laws had symbolized.

Nevertheless, arguably some principles of the purity laws and sacred space are still applicable. Even in the Old Testament cleanness and uncleanness metaphorically symbolized moral purity and impurity, and moral purity is still a Christian ideal. Moreover, the "place" where two or more gather in Christ's name becomes, by that fact, "holy ground," and as holy ground can be defiled, not by ceremonial, but by ethical impurity. It remains true that those who would metaphorically ascend the hill of the LORD at the sacred places where believers gather, must have (ethically) "clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps 24:3–4) lest that sacred time and place be defiled.

The following chapter deals with practical theological, homiletical and missiological implications of a Christ-centred application of Numbers 19 in an African context. The

chapter will elaborate on the applications of these theological principles gained from the hermeneutical principles and exegesis of Numbers 19.

CHAPTER 4: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY, HOMILETICAL, AND MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A VALID CHRIST-CENTRED INTERPRETATION OF NUMBERS 19 IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

4.1 A Summary of various valid ways to preach Christ from the Old Testament as well as Numbers 19

In the previous chapter it was argued that, in order to apply key aspects of Numbers 19 for the present, especially in the context of AICs, the principle must be applied that earlier revelations should be read in the light of later ones (on the same subject). After studying the intention of the message for the original readers of a Bible pericope, it is necessary to consider how the symbols presented in the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ, to reach a valid Christ-centred application. Earlier promissory statements of God may be understood more deeply and applied more directly, once the promises contained in ceremonies were beginning to fulfil, and especially when they were completely fulfilled (Poythress, 1986:226).

The character of Scripture entails recording a redemptive history that is both linear and proceeds according to a pattern. This structure helps scholars recognise that God's promises (prophecies in the broadest sense of the term) typically have multiple horizons of fulfilment. Lawrence (2010), makes a valuable remark and provides a useful illustration in this regard, "What's more, each successive fulfilments occurs not only later in time chronologically, but is greater in significance both theologically and historically." (This is depicted in the chart below as he presents it.)

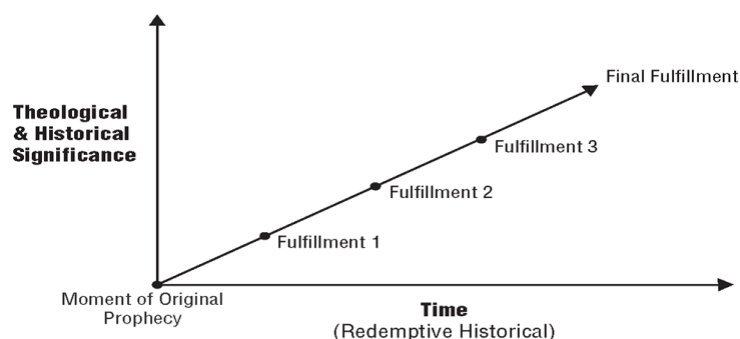


Figure 5-1: Theological and historical significance

In his book about preaching Christ from the Old Testament, Greidanus (1999:203-225, 234-276) lists seven ways of preaching Christ from the Old Testament in a valid and convincing way. These ways also provide guidelines to be followed when working towards a valid Christ-centred application of Numbers 19 in this study:

- **Redemptive-historical progression:** following the progression of redemptive history as it moves forward from the text's historical setting to Jesus' first or second coming.
- **Promise-fulfilment:** showing that the promise of a coming Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus' first coming on earth.
- **Typology:** moving from an Old Testament redemptive event, person, or institution that functions as type prefiguring Jesus to the antitype, Jesus himself, by showing the analogies and escalations.
- **Analogy:** noting the similarity between the teaching of the text and that of Jesus, or the analogy between the author's goal in sending this message and Jesus' goal with one or more of his messages.
- **Longitudinal themes:** a technical term in biblical theology meaning that one traces a topic or a major theme of the text through the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.
- **New Testament reference:** moving to New Testament quotations of or allusions to the preaching text, or to Jesus' teachings on the same topic.
- **Contrast:** acknowledging the contrast between the message of the Old Testament text and the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament.

Some of these ways may prove to be helpful in understanding and interpreting Numbers 19 for a contemporary audience.

4.2 The method of redemptive-historical progression applied to Numbers 19

From the earliest times in the history of the human race God indicates in his revelation that more is to come. History and the promises of God are forward-looking: the story is yet to be completed. As was indicated, it is altogether natural to construe this as

implying that earlier promissory statements of God may be understood more deeply once the promises begin to be fulfilled, and especially when they are completely fulfilled (Poythress, 1986:226).

The grand narrative of the Bible³ sketches how God's history with the world progresses from His good creation (Gn 1), to the human fall into sin, following God's plan of redemption through the Seed of the woman (3:15), to Christ (the Gospels), and to the new Creation (Rv 22). Thus, the Bible depicts a continuous progression of redemptive history with Christ at its centre.

In applying this principle to Numbers 19, redemptive history can be depicted as follows:

In Numbers 19, God provides his people with a religious rite to purify themselves from the defilement of death. Contact with death – as the epitome of God's curse on man's sin and rebellion – renders people unclean so that they must be cut off from fellowship with a holy God and his holy people (Nm 19:13, 20). However, God stipulates that sprinkling with special water, the water of purification, containing the ashes of the red heifer, cleanse that person and restores fellowship with God. The operative principle provided in the rites of Numbers 19 is *sympathetic*: death rids the community of death (Greidanus, 2004:10).

Ashes represent annihilation and are therefore, effective when applied to people and objects defiled through contact with the dead. The operative cultic principle in this case is *substitution* (Levine, 1993:471).

Throughout Old Testament history, water is associated with ceremonial cleansing. At the Tabernacle/Temple the priests had a bronze basin filled with water to wash their hands and feet (Ex 30:21). On many occasions the Israelites were commanded to wash their clothes and bath themselves to be ritually clean. In Numbers 19 as well, the priest that touches the red heifer is to "wash his clothes and bathe his body in water" (Nm 19:7; see also vv 8-10). However, in this case God also prescribes special water meant to remove this grave ritual uncleanness that people contracted through contact with death.

³ With "grand narrative of the Bible" is meant a narrative that begins with creation and ends with the new creation. For an excellent treatment of this understanding, consult William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); and *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984).

Furthermore Israel introduced the development of water baptism for proselytes. In the New Testament, John the Baptist proclaims: “A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins ...” (Mk 1:4). From there it is a mere step to Christian baptism: “Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven” (Acts 2:38). John’s baptism is replaced by baptism “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Ac 19:3-5) and “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

4.3 The method of typology applied to Numbers 19

Understanding the method of typology prevents biblical scholars from moralising and allegorising the Old Testament. In interpreting and applying an Old Testament text, there are basically four options to consider.

No application: The first option is to decide beforehand there is no application. This text was for “them” alone. This is usually not an option. The other three options are moralism, allegory, and typology.

Moralism: is the result when an Old Testament type is applied directly to contemporary people and situations. The movement is direct from Old Testament text to contemporary application. Lawrence (2010:76) provides a helpful illustration to explain moralistic application of Old Testament texts.

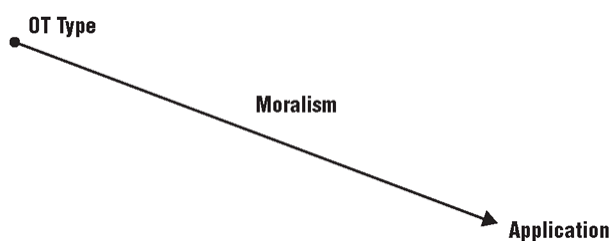


Figure 5-2: Moralistic application of Old Testament texts

From this explanation, it is clear that the AIC’s application of Numbers 19 misunderstands the typological character of this text, which leads to a moralistic application.

In agreement with Lints, Lawrence (2010:75) defines typology as: “Symbolism with a prospective reference to fulfilment in a later epoch of biblical history. It involves a fundamentally organic relation between events, persons, and institutions (type) in one epoch and their counterparts (antitype) in later epochs.”

He provides the following illustration to explain how an Old Testament type can and should be interpreted in a valid way and thereby lead to personal application.

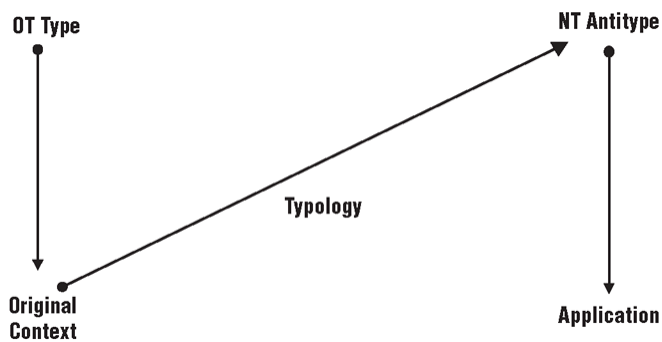


Figure 5-3: Old Testament type can and should be interpreted

Typology: In the way depicted above, typology joins the Old Testament events, persons, and objects to Christ. In understanding and applying Old Testament events and objects as types, provides insight into what Christ accomplished for the believers in their salvation. In this Christ acted as God’s anointed but veiled mediator who delivers God’s people through his sacrifice. The primary point of application thus moves from moral effort on the believers’ part to worship and faith in Christ as their only Saviour.

Allegory: It is important to understand the difference between typology and allegory. Allegory misuses the text by forcing it to say whatever the interpreter or preacher wants it to say. This approach focuses merely on the details of the text, while typology finds analogies along the acts and instructions of God in redemptive history as revealed in the Scripture. Typology can easily be turned into *typologising*, which happens when interpreters interpret every detail in the text as a type.

4.3.1 The characteristics of typology

Hugenberger (1995:105-140), following Louis Berkhof, offers the following guidelines to explain the characteristics of typology, “A type is an actual historical person, event or object that God has providentially given in order to use that person, event or object to

point beyond the person, event or object. In the type-anti-type relationship, there is a comparison of historical realities that establish an analogy or pattern, which then organically develops and expands.”

Therefore to tell whether an event, person, object, and institution is typology, it must present a historical fact.

4.3.2 Theocentric

The type must be providentially designed to foreshadow God’s ultimate redemptive activity in Christ. Therefore, the type should be theocentric, which means the acts of God in and through events and a person should point to God’s sovereign grace and love for his people, and thus reveals the glory of God.

4.3.3 Significant analogy

Unlike a mere symbol, which represents a general truth or idea, a type by nature must look forward to its specific and greater fulfilment in the anti-type. Therefore, a true typology shows the “significant analogy with its antitype” (Greidanus, 1999:256).

4.3.4 Rules for using typology

Greidanus, (1999:270) provides the following summary of rules which help the researcher to understand and apply typology:

- Firstly, typology must follow the literal-historical interpretation. Scholars must first look for the message that a historical incident, figure or ritual had for Israel before applying the passage to Christ. It should not be the other way round.
- Secondly, scholars need to seek types not in details but in the main redemptive message of the Old Testament text.
- Thirdly, the type must have a symbolic meaning linked to the person, institution, or event in the Old Testament, otherwise it cannot be considered as a type.
- Fourthly, scholars have to keep in mind the ways in which the Old Testament type differs from the New Testament antitype

- Fifthly, when moving from the Old Testament to Christ, scholars must retain the meaning of the Old Testament type as it is known within the context of the Old Testament. They are not to move from the Old Testament meaning to a new meaning they we could find in the New Testament.
- Sixthly, it is not acceptable merely to use typology to draw a line to Christ. Rather the type must proclaim Christ and his redemption. Merely drawing a line to Christ is not proclaiming Christ at all.

4.3.5 Typology applied to Numbers 19

The method of typology is relevant for the interpretation of Numbers 19 in the following ways:

The water for cleansing was made special because the ashes of the red heifer were mixed into it. The ashes of the heifer, therefore, validate this sign of cleansing. The burning of the Red Heifer and Jesus' crucifixion is symbolically connected in the Book of Hebrews. It is stated that Jesus was a "sin offering" for the world and that His sin-atoning death epitomised the symbolic role of all the previous sin offerings sacrificed at the Temple (Hb 10:8-14; cf. also Martin, 1992:113)

The author of Hebrews also connected the ashes of the Red Heifer (which were mixed with pure spring water) with the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, which occurred at the time of his crucifixion (Hb 9:13, 14). This passage uses the image of the red-heifer ceremony to depict Christ who cleanses the believers of the effect of "dead works". Dead works refer either to acts that lead to death (NIV), "useless rituals" in view of salvation (TEV), or to works produced prior to being regenerated in Christ (cf. Hb 6:1). Martin (1992:114) explains, "And particularly note this point. In the Letter of Barnabas (written by a person from Jerusalem about AD 90), the author stated that the Red Heifer in Christian circles was reckoned as Jesus. The calf is Jesus: the sinful men offering it are those who led him to the slaughter."

In this sense, the red heifer is a symbol depicting cleansing from defilement and restoration to fellowship with God. As such, the heifer can function as a type of Christ whose death provided the cleansing needed from the stain of sin and the curse of death and who restored his people once and for all to fellowship with God (Greidanus, 1999:270).

4.4 Analogy applied to Numbers 19

Analogy is another way to preach Christ by starting from the Old Testament. Analogy already occurs in the Old Testament narratives. It relates one event or person to another event or person.

4.4.1 Examples of analogy and its application in Numbers 19

The method of analogy can virtually duplicate the application of typology above: As God provided Israel with a way to be ritually clean and restored to fellowship with God, so God provides his people in the present times with his only Son to cleanse them from their sins and restore them to fellowship with God.

However, analogy can move beyond the use of typology by connecting the teaching of the law that directs cleanness and uncleanness, to the teaching of Jesus or the apostles. For example, as God through this law taught Israel that they needed to be clean, that is, holy, for fellowship with God, so Jesus teaches God's people that they ought to be clean not just on the outside but on the inside as well (Lk 11:37-41; Mt 15:10-20; 1 Pt 1:15).

In this regard the author of Hebrews contrasts the outward cleansing of defiled persons with inner cleansing in the words of Hebrews 9:13, 14:

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

4.5 Longitudinal themes applied to Numbers 19

Another way to preach Christ from the Old Testament is by using longitudinal themes.

“Longitudinal themes” is a technical term in the discipline of biblical theology. It refers to themes that can be traced through the Scriptures from the Old to the New Testament. The concept of longitudinal themes can be used when preaching Christ, seeing that every major Old Testament theme leads to Christ (Greidanus 2004:11).

Hasel (1984:126) explains, “A canonical biblical theology has the task of providing summary interpretations of the final form of books or groups of writings of the Bible from

which the common longitudinal themes of the entire Bible emerge and need to be presented. The unity of the Bible will be seen most profoundly on the basis of these multiple direct and indirect connections.” These themes are found in the Old Testament and have developed as God progressively reveals himself.

The laws governing cleanness and uncleanness embody the themes of life and death, often on an indirect, symbolic plane. Contact with the dead body of a human being is naturally direct contact with human death, the primary curse of the fall. This condition creates maximum defilement, and requires seven days for cleansing (Nm 19:11-19; see also Poythress, 1995:50; Sprinkle, 2000:650).

In considering and applying the purity system as a longitudinal theme it is helpful to understand that it conveys symbolically that YHWH is the God of life (order) and is separated from that which has to do with death (disorder). Corpses and carcasses rendered a person unclean because these objects obviously have to do with death. Most (though not all) of the unclean animals are somehow associated with death, either being predators/scavengers (animals with paws rather than hoofs), or living in tomb-like caves (e.g. rock badgers). The pig in particular, in addition to being a scavenger, was associated with the worship of chthonic or underworld deities and/or demons among the Hittites, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians. A skin disease rendered a person unclean, because it caused that individual to waste away like a corpse (cf. Nm 12:12: “Let her not be like a corpse,” referring to Miriam’s skin disease).

Douglas (2001: 20) has shown the connection between cleanness/holiness and such concepts as “wholeness”, “physical perfection”, and “completeness”. Therefore, priests and animals with the same physical imperfections were ineligible for the sanctuary (Lv 21:17-21; 22:20-24). Physical imperfections, representing a movement from “life” towards “death”, moved a person ritually away from God, who is to be associated with life. This symbolic system helped separate YHWH worship from necromancy, spiritualism, and ancestor veneration, since dealings with the dead rendered a person unclean (cf. Lv 19:31 where consulting spiritualists declares people morally “unclean”).

By the longitudinal method, scholars can start with the theme purification of the ceremonially unclean and the law in Numbers 19. This law was to be a perpetual statute for the Israelites and for the aliens residing among them (Nm 19:10). This law can then be traced to the baptism of John the Baptist, which was “a baptism of repentance for the

forgiveness of sins” (Mk 1:4), and eventually to the Christian baptism of the apostles: “Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven” (Ac 2:38), according to the teaching of the apostles.

Not only does Christian baptism connect with Christ by in the sense that believers are baptised in his name. The apostolic teaching about the significance of baptism reveals many links with concepts related to reconciliation with God in Numbers 19. For example, in Romans 6:4 Paul links baptism to death and life, implying that, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Col 2:12-14 offers even more links with the mentioned Old Testament passage – not only death and life but also sin washed away in forgiveness: “When you are buried with him (Christ) in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses ... God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record ... nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:12-15).

4.6 New Testament references applied to Numbers 19

Greidanus (1999:270) explains that the writers of the New Testament referred to the Old Testament to underscore the meaning of their messages. New Testament verses that quote or allude to the Old Testament preaching can serve as bridges to preaching Christ. The appendix in a Greek New Testament lists many of these quotations.

Preachers should be careful to take into consideration that the New Testament writers did not always seek to interpret Old Testament passages but simply used the passages to illustrate their point (see, e.g., Paul’s allegory in Gal 4). It is best, therefore, for biblical scholars to work first with the above mentioned five methods and then investigate whether the New Testament supports any of these methods as ways to Christ. Frequently interpreters can build a solid bridge to Christ by combining the way they discerned, for example, the theme of promise-fulfilment, with a New Testament reference (Greidanus, 2004:10).

The Greek New Testament lists two references to the passage under investigation (Nm 19). The first is an allusion in Hebrews 9:19, which is not very helpful for our purposes. The second reference to Hebrews 9:13-14, is much more promising because it confirms typology, “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who

are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who though the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleans our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Hb 9:13-14).

Consulting a Concordance on the word “sprinkling”, provides a further promising reference in Hebrews to Numbers 19: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Hb 10:19-22).

A further search in the Concordance on the word “water”, leads to Ephesians 5:25b-27, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind-yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.”

Such a search also brings to the fore the intriguing possibility of Acts 10:47 – intriguing since in that context God sent Peter to the house of the Gentile Cornelius and showed him that the ancient distinction between cleanness and uncleanness was no longer valid, especially as it was employed to distinguish Jews and Gentiles. An angel of God reprimanded Peter: “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (Ac 10:15). When Peter arrived at the home of Cornelius and proclaimed Jesus Christ to him and his family, the Holy Spirit descended on the Gentiles who were present. Peter responded, “Can anyone withhold the water of baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Ac 10:47-48).

Finally, consulting the Concordance on the word “unclean”, provides two interesting passages. In 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, Paul combines several Old Testament passages to teach the Corinthians about holiness: “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters says the Lord Almighty.” Furthermore, in Romans 14:14 Paul asserts: “I know and persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is

unclean in itself. This New Testament reference (as well as Acts 10 above) alerts to the progression in redemptive history and revelation, which introduces a new method, namely of contrast.

4.7 Contrast applied to Numbers 19

Another way to preach Christ by moving from the Old to the New Testament is by identifying a contrast between the Old Testament and Christ. This way is different from others because its focal point is *discontinuity* between the Old Testament and Christ, while the other methods focus on the *continuity* between the Old Testament and Christ.

The way of becoming holy by the cleansing water as according to Numbers 19 was discontinued by Christ in the New Testament. Believers do no longer become holy by washing themselves with the ritual water. They are holy because Christ has made them holy by his blood, as emphasised by the writer of Hebrews: “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ for all” (Hb 10:10). Christ has offered himself as the final sacrifice that takes away the sins of humankind (Hb 10:10-14). Moreover, Christ has put aside the old covenant and established the new covenant with his people (Hb 10:9-18).

4.8 Analysis of the key verses used by AIC church leaders when performing cleansing rituals

The pastors and priests of the AIC understand and interpret Numbers 19 in a certain way in order to make purification rituals acceptable and necessary for Christians. This can be seen in the way they link Numbers 19 to other passages in the Bible.

In most cases, the AIC leaders use Numbers 19 in connection with Job 42:8, Joel 2:15, and sometimes John 17:17, to perform the purification rituals. Job 42:8 is used prescriptively regarding the giving of presents and gifts in during the cleansing rituals. It is clear that the underlying thought for this practice is that cleansing need to be earned and deserved by giving gifts and presents, which is a moralistic train of thought.

They use John 17:17 to confirm the cleansing rituals as a means of being sanctified and cleansed. Some use the verse after the cleansing ceremony has taken place (Dladla, P. 2013h). The underlying thought is that the claim that cleanliness and sanctification is actually received through the sacrifices and the ritual of being sprinkled with water

mixed with ashes by a man of God. This sanctification thus lies in the active participation.

In the light of the arguments above it is clear that the AIC leaders' total inability to understand the principle of typology leads to their moralistic application of Numbers 19.

4.9 The ritual as law of cleansing

In the cyclical structure of the Book of Numbers, chapter 19 provides the important section on "laws governing the community of faith". Later in Jewish history this passage would serve as the basis for a variety of applications of purification ritual beyond that of cleansing subjects of defilement through association with the dead. A parallel passage is found in Deuteronomy 21:1-10, which details the community ritual for the expiation of sin and impurity caused by an unsolved murder or death. This passage provided additional warning to future generations about the grave consequences of rebellion against the Lord, as their forefathers experienced in the wilderness.

4.10 The rationale of the instruction to implement the cleansing law

Carson (1994:186) explains that the reason for God establishing this law was to prevent the defilement of the sanctuary (v 20) Keil and Delitzsch (2002: 733-738) point out in connection with verse 20 that the threat of punishment for the neglect of purification is repeated from verse 13, to state it most emphatic.

Regarding the rationale of the laws in the Pentateuch directing cleanness and uncleanness, Sprinkle (2000:637-657) focused on the following aspects: hygiene, association with disgusting, pagan or demonic things; ethical lessons; associating YHWH with life and wholeness rather than with death and disorder; separation of holiness from expressions of sexuality; separation from the Gentiles; and holiness of God versus contamination of man.

4.10.1 Hygiene

The well-known and the easy explanation for the laws of cleanness and uncleanness concerns physical hygiene. The mere fact that those who had leprosy were sent outside the camp shows that the measure was to prevent leprosy from spreading (Lv 13-14; 15:2-15). This also applied to the law on avoiding carcasses, or eating animals that died of natural causes, or contacting human sputum and discharge. The ritual baths

associated with returning to cleanness would also contribute to physical hygiene. Certain unclean animals are known to transfer diseases to humans: the pig bears trichinosis (tapeworm), the hare tularaemia; carrion-eating birds harbour various diseases, and fish without fins and scales attract diseases because they are mud burrowers. The eating of animal suet is presently known to lead to heart disease. However, physical hygiene was a secondary reason for the cleaning laws. The primary reason will be explicated in the following subsection.

4.10.2 Association with disgusting, pagan or demonic creatures

Certain animals and creatures were regarded unclean because of their connection to paganism. This entails animals such as snakes (Lv 11:24), camels (Lv 11:4; Dt 14:7), and creatures that people dislike because its behaviour. For example, some people abhor snakes because of the curse that accompanied the fall in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:14-15).

4.10.3 Associating YHWH with life and wholeness rather than death and disorder

The law of purity symbolises that God is the God of life and order and has nothing to do with death and disorder. Contact with dead bodies leaves people unclean for they are devoid of life, and thus also separated from God, who is life.

Purification rituals symbolise the movement to life as it includes blood of an animal mixed with water (Lv 17:11, 14; 5, 50; Nm 19:2, 17). This also explains why Israel was not allowed to cook a kid (goat) in its mothers' milk (Ex 23:19; 34:36; Dt 14:21). This is a clear indication that those belonging to JHWH cannot the symbol of life and the symbol of death.

4.10.4 Separation from the Gentiles

It is clear that the laws of cleanness or purity were to separate the Israelites from the Gentiles as will be explained below.

4.10.4.1 People groups

From the Old Testament narratives it can be deduced that in the land of Israel there were three groups of people.

- **Priests** – who were holy and made different from the rest of the Israelites as their work was to serve God fully in the tabernacle.
- **Ordinary people** – Israelites who were considered clean and separated from non-Israelites.
- **Non-Israelites** – who were regarded as unclean, because they performed wicked practices such as the worshipping of idols (Lv 18:30; Dt 7:1-5, 25, 26, 20:17-18).

4.10.4.2 The land

In the land, firstly, there was a Tabernacle which was regarded as holy. Secondly, there was land that was occupied by the Israelites, and was regarded as clean. Thirdly, there was land occupied by the gentiles and regarded unclean. Moreover, the food eaten by the Israelites was considered clean and different from those eaten by the Gentiles, whose diet included pig, an unclean animal to the Jews.

The food laws were done away with in the New Testament (Mk 7:19; Ac 10:15. 11:9; Rm 14:14.) Yet, in the new messianic age, God's people still need to separate themselves from the rest of the world; this separation is no longer on the issue of race and ethnicity (as it was in the case of Israel), but of holiness in fellowship with God.

Missiological studies points out that only a church striving to live as a community in contrast to the world will have an impact on its community. In this regard Goheen asserts, "We live as part of our culture, and yet as a contrast community we challenge the religious spirits that are incompatible with the kingdom of God" (Goheen, 2011:200).

4.10.5 Holiness of God versus contamination of man

Most importantly, the laws of cleanness in the Pentateuch emphasised the holiness of God (Lv 11:44-45). Therefore, it is no wonder that God struck Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, for God wanted to maintain his holiness (10:3). Because God is holy, he wants his people to be holy as well (Lv 11:44-45). From this can be argued: The fact that God wanted his people to be holy shows that they were unclean and contaminated before him. They could not approach God in the Tent of Meeting, unless they purified themselves with the purification that God has provided.

Those who touched or ate unclean animals were regarded as unclean. As a result, they were forbidden the opportunity to approach God in worship and were cut off from contact with the holy community of Israel. By undergoing the cleansing ritual, they were made ceremonially clean and restored to both the worship of God and fellowship with God's holy community.

The Christ-centric focus of Numbers 19 becomes clear when the cleansing rituals, including the heifer that was slaughtered, is interpreted as pointers to Christ. It proclaims the Lord whose blood completely cleanses all of humankind's sins (Hb 9:13,14), and helps all who belong to him to live in fellowship with a holy God in worship, as Hebrew 10:19-22 testifies:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

4.11 Homiletical exegesis and guidelines for preaching Christ from Numbers 19

A number of biblical commentators do apply exegetical methods to preach Christ from Numbers 19:1-22. In doing so, they often utilise the motive of red heifer and its ashes.

4.11.1 The red heifer and its ashes

In preaching Christ from this passage, Henry (1997:164) draws the line from the red heifer as a type of Christ. Henry argues: "The mere fact that the red heifer was wholly burnt typifies the painful sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in soul and body, as a sacrifice made by fire, to satisfy God's justice for man's sin." Unfortunately Henry does not provide more biblical evidence for this comparison between the incineration of the heifer and the depths of misery experienced in the sufferings of Christ.

In their preaching of Christ, Pfeiffer and Harrison (1990:136-137) state, "Just as the ashes of the red heifer ceremonially cleansed a defiled Israelite, so Christ's blood satisfies divine justice, purges a poor sinner's conscience, and restores him to God." They rightly point out that many strained allegorical and over-stressed typological interpretations regarding the use of this red heifer have been put forward, in which each

detail, including the colour of the animal, is loaded with a spiritual meaning. It is better to regard such a ceremony as one would an artist's painting, recognising that, while the whole conveys a message, the details become insignificant when considered independently. Hebrew 9:13-14 underscores the message of this object lesson, which is that God's people need to experience cleansing from impurity. Just as the ashes of the red heifer ceremonially cleansed a defiled Israelite, so Christ's blood satisfies divine justice, purges sinners inwardly, and restore them to God.

In preaching Christ by referring to the heifer, Anastasia Boniface-Malle in the *Africa Bible Commentary* (Boniface-Malle 2010:192) points out that God opened the better way of cleansing that is different from the blood of goats and bulls, and which cleanses our conscience from such acts that lead to death.

Henry (1997:164), referring to the ashes of the red heifer, explains that, although these substances were meant for ceremonial purification, they were a type of the deeper purification for sin, which the Lord Jesus provided through his death.

Cole (2000:301) states in this regard that the writer of the Book of Hebrews (9:13-14) compared the cleansing of someone by the ashes of the red heifer to that "of the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ, noting that the work of Christ ultimately superseded that of the Old Testament purification rituals." Cole continues to explain that "the ashes of the red heifer could only cleanse the outward man, for the purifying of the flesh, (NKJV), but the blood of Christ accomplished the cleansing of the conscience, the inward man". He argues that Jesus has already accomplished this purification act, "once and for all, so that we might be delivered from that which leads to death, and instead live to serve him, the living God" (Cole 2000:301).

In preaching Christ from Numbers 19, Fritsch (1947:94) draws the following lines:

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was considered by New Testament writers to be typical of the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him he said: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world' (Jn 1:29). The blood of every innocent victim and the faith of every Old Testament offerer were now made efficacious through the offering up of the perfect Lamb of God for the sin of the world. Without His coming, the Old Testament sacrifices would have been meaningless and worthless.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is anxious to make it clear that the Old Testament sacrificial system was transitory and unsatisfactory. However through the whole process God was teaching His children that there is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood. In this sense, Christ's sacrifice can be viewed as the perfect fulfilment of the Levitical sacrifices.

In the Old Testament a sacrifice evidently was a necessary component of the covenant-establishing ritual (Gn 15; Ex 24). However, the covenant made between God and His people on Sinai was broken by the people's faithlessness and had to be renewed, as Jeremiah 31 indicates. Christ, through His death, became the mediator of this new covenant, which is eternal and unbreakable (Hb 9:15 ff). In Hebrews 10 the author reiterates how ineffectual the sacrifices of the Old Testament were. But in this case he also includes the "whole burnt offering", which inherently implied the motive of the complete surrender and consecration of the offerer to God, as shown by the burning of the victim on the altar. In this respect Christ also fulfilled this sacrifice perfectly, for God had given Him a body that He, in turn, offered in perfect, daily self-oblation and in His death on the cross (cf. Rm 5:19; Ep 5:2; Phl 2:8, and the practical application in Rm 12:1)" (Fritsch, 1947:94-95).

4.11.2 **Water**

Burge and Hill (2012:134-135) emphasise the importance of the water in this ritual and draw the line from the cleansing water to Christ who is the true Living Water. According to Keil and Delizsch (2002:733-736) all the participants had to wash their clothes, "After which the persons were to wash their clothes and bathe, that they might be clean in the evening."

In contrast, Cole (2001:301) points out that, at the conclusion of the ritual sprinkling of the ashes and water mixture, the previously clean person who had applied the purifying potion was to undergo the same ritual bathing process as the priest and his assistants who prepared and gathered the ashes (vv 7, 8, 10). These individuals would wash their garments, then bathe themselves with pure water, but still remain in a state of uncleanness until sundown. Thereafter they could re-clothe them with the purified garments, and could be deemed clean and able to participate in the holiness of the community.

It is clear that the previously ceremonially unclean individuals had to wash their own clothes, as was the case with the people mentioned in verses 7, 8, and 10. Therefore, it does not seem possible that the pattern could just change without any given reason. In considering this fact a New Testament reader of the Book of Hebrews who refers to Numbers 19 is reminded of the contrast between the priests of the old covenant and Christ's perfect priestly ministry. The Levitical high priests were obliged to offer sacrifices for their own sins and thereafter for those of the people. Christ is not obliged to offer such sacrifices, seeing that he has already done so once and for all, when he offered the sacrifice of himself.

Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever (Hb 7:26-28).

4.11.3 Ways of preaching Christ from the whole cleansing ritual

Pfeiffer in the Wycliffe Bible Commentary provides the following guidelines to preach Christ, "Just as the ashes of a red heifer ceremonially cleansed a defiled Israelite, even so Christ's blood satisfies divine justice, purges a poor sinner's conscience, and restores him to God" (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1997:137).

Boniface-Malle in the *Africa Bible Commentary* formulates this theme as follows: "The writer of Hebrews refers to this ceremonial purification when he speaks of the cleansing of the consciences of believers from the defilement of sin and futile rituals. He shows that God established a better way: "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ ... cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God" (Boniface-Malle 2006:192).

Carson *et al.*(1994:186-187) explain how the red heifer's ashes had to be mixed in water, which was then used for cleansing. He points out that this practice was not new. Moses had also mixed blood of calves with hyssop, scarlet wool and water, and

sprinkled this mixture onto the people and on the scroll of the covenant (Ex 24:6-8; see also Hb 9:19-22). They goes on to stress Hebrews teaching that sin cannot be cleansed without shedding blood (Hb 9:2). “Yet this sprinkling with the ashes of a heifer only cleansed the flesh; the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience (9:13-14). If anyone neglected the water of cleansing, he would be deliberately spurning what God had provided, and thus committing wilful sin, done in full knowledge of God’s law” (Carson, *et al.*, 1994:186). From this it is clear that the same principle applies to Christ’s sacrifice. Who refuses to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is condemned already (Jn 3:18). Such a person has negated the only means provided by God to remove humankind’s sins.

4.11.4 The rationale for conducting the cleansing ritual

Carson (1994:186) states, “The reason for putting this law here is found in v 20: if anyone is unclean, he defiles the sanctuary.”

Several commentaries explain the relation between these rituals and the holiness of God as the reason for God’s people to perform cleansing rituals. Therefore, those who were regarded as ceremonially unclean were sent outside the camp, and were not allowed to approach God, lest they defile God’s Tabernacle (vv 13, 20).

These views are helpful in understanding Numbers 19. However, some commentaries are over-eager to attach the motive of the red heifer to Christ without first thoroughly interpreting the passage as the Jews would have understood it in the time of Moses. In this sense, they interpret the Bible as if it was written for Christians of the new covenant instead of the Jews. Matthew Henry’s commentary is an example. In his dealing with the red heifer he borders on allegorising details that cannot really be backed up with clear references to the New Testament.

4.12 Other practical homiletical guidelines

There are other practical guidelines for preaching that avoid the pitfalls of typologising or allegorising, as is outlined below.

4.12.1 Salvation-historical or redemptive historical issues

According to the Old Testament God encouraged his people to remain holy as he is holy (Lv 11:44, 45). However, this was not always the case with the Israelites. They

would time and again become sinful or impure. Thus, to set things right, God would provide laws and regulations that included offering sacrifices and performing cleansing rituals for the unclean (Lv 1-7, Nm 19). The blood of animals and water for purification were used for the cleansing of the unclean. Those on whom these rituals were performed were afterwards regarded as clean. Hence they were able to approach God in worship through their offerings that were offered by the priests.

The blood of animals points to the blood of Christ. The sacrificed animals as such did not provide cleansing. It was merely a sign (a ceremony) pointing towards God's own provision in the coming Christ. Therefore, those who have embraced Christ and completely trust in him alone as the Mediator do not need the blood of animals in order to be cleansed from sin. The blood of Christ is sufficient once for all. When preaching from Numbers 19 it will be of the utmost importance for a Christian preacher to show how Christ fulfilled the promises of the mentioned ceremonies.

4.12.2 Biblical-theological issues

As was stated in the previous chapter, the goal of the laws directing cleanness and uncleanness was to show the holiness of God. This includes the laws of Numbers 19, in which God is revealed as holy God who abhor uncleanness. As God is holy, he wants his people to be holy as well. In preaching from this passage, God's call to New Testament believers in Christ is that they should be holy like God by making sure that they avoid the unholy lifestyles and constantly commit themselves in faith to Christ.

Encouraging his readers to remain holy, Peter warns, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Pt 1:16). Paul encourages holy life among his readers by stating, "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thes 4:7).

According to the Old Testament the Israelites were able to approach God, provided they were ceremonially clean. In contrast, Christ has cleansed believers by taking away their sins and made it possible for those, who belong to Him, to approach God.

4.12.3 Soteriological and doctrinal issues taught and underscored from **Numbers 19**

Numbers 19 teaches about the doctrine of sin and its result, namely death. According to Numbers 19 everyone who touches the dead was to be regarded unclean. In other words, every contact with the dead – in whichever way – associated them with sin that formed a barrier between them and God. God commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if he did he would surely die (Gn 2:17). In disobedience, Adam did eat from the forbidden tree. As a result, he fell into sin (Gn 3). Because of the sin of Adam, God regards all human beings as sinners, for they have inherited sin from Adam, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5). Sin separates humans from God, “Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Is 59:1-2).

The concept that sin separates or cuts off access to God is also clearly stated in Numbers 19. In this context those who were regarded as ceremonially unclean were not allowed to approach God in worship and to live in the midst of the holy community, “Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the Lord’s tabernacle. That person must be cut off from Israel” (Nm 19:13). Moreover, “If a person who is unclean does not purify himself, he must be cut off from the community, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD” (Nm 19:20).

Christ came to destroy the barrier of sin between God and man, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ep 2:14). The cleansing of Christ, is better than the cleansing rituals, which only cleansed people outwardly (“the flesh”) – “for the blood of Christ cleanses us of all sins” (Hb 9:13-14). Christ is the atoning sacrifice for believers’ sins, and not only for their sins, also for the sins of the world as a whole (1 Jn. 2:2).

In understanding and applying Numbers 19 in a Christ-centred way, it becomes clear that salvation is received through grace alone, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourself, it is the gift of God” (Ep 2:8). Therefore, due to their moralistic way of interpreting and applying Numbers 19, the AIC leaders miss the opportunity of emphasising the biblical motive of salvation through grace alone.

4.12.4 Sin brought death

The Bible states plainly that death came as the result of sin, “Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all have sinned” (Rm 5:12).

What is true of the verse above, also applies to Numbers 19. In the preceding chapters the sin of rebellion by Korah and his company (Nm 16) brought about death (Nm 16:35, 49). As the result of death, dead human bodies were strewn all over in the wilderness. Anyone who had contact with the dead was defiled. As remedy for defilement, God provided the purification water (19:1-22).

4.13 Assurance of victory over all evil through Christ

In African animistic or semi-animistic contexts it is of vital importance to keep the fear of evil spirits in mind. This can be done effectively by preaching Christ-centred redemptive sermons from Numbers 19. By pursuing the cleansing as a longitudinal theme in redemptive history it can be pointed out how Colossians 2:12-14 offers a clear link with Numbers 19, not only regarding death and life but also pointing out that sin is washed away in forgiveness:

Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him in baptism and raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Thus, those who believe in Christ, knows that they have victory over evil spirits through their Lord. They do not need to perform cleansing ceremonies out of fear of evil spirits.

In the times of the Old Testament, Israel believed that the area outside the camp was to be seen as the place of uncleanness. There the refuse and dung were thrown away. There outside the camp the unclean lepers had to live. This area was also viewed as the place of sin and evil, as well as shame and uncleanness. In contrast, God’s children do not have to live under the fear of all evil, away from God’s personal care and

protection, because through his death Christ defeated all the powers and authorities on the cross. Christ also cancelled the charges that were against the believers for disobeying the Law of Moses, and nailed these charges to the cross. He made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession (Col 2:9, 15).

When explaining that Christ cancelled all the charges that came as result of disobeying the Law of Moses, it should be emphasised that this motive includes Numbers 19:1-22. This passage focuses on every Israelite who disobeyed the Law by touching the dead body, grave, bone, or entering in a tent in which someone died. Charges of disobeying the law were laid against such individuals and they were regarded ceremonially unclean. As a result, an unclean person was not allowed to come closer to the Tent of Meeting to worship God, but was sent outside the camp – the place associated with evil.

In an article, “Evangelical spirituality: A Biblical scholar’s perspective”, the Old Testament scholar Waltke (1988:19) points out how Old Testament saints conquered Satan by counting on his damnation. Every time they saw a serpent eating dust, the symbol of abject humiliation and utter defeat, they were reminded that God judged Satan and they anticipated by faith the seed that would destroy him (Gn 3:14-15). This judgment found fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Christ (Jn 16:11; Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8). By reminding Christians that Satan was defeated at the cross (Col 2:15; Mt 25-28), Christians may live and encounter Satan and his forces without fear.

Davis, (2007:77-118) in an article, “Contemporary spiritual warfare and missiology”, explains that in the Old Testament physical objects or external forms were never carriers of power – as is claimed in magic and animism, and also still believed by many AIC leaders. Jesus Christ is the Champion (*Christus Victor*) of the history of salvation. He came into this world “to preach the gospel ... [and] to proclaim release to the captives” (Lk 4:18). He came “to taste death for everyone ... [and] that He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hb 2:14). At the time of his death Christ announced to the forces of evil that the decisive victory against the devil had been won (cf. Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8).

4.14 Free access to God through Christ

Uncleanness prohibited the people of Israel from coming to the tent of the Lord (Nm 19:13). In this context, a red heifer had to be slaughtered and the priest had to sprinkle

its blood seven times on the tabernacle (Nm 19:4), for people to gain access to the tabernacle of the Lord. The heifer's body had to be burnt together with a scarlet cloth, hyssop, and cedar wood (Nm 19:5-6). Thereafter the ashes of the heifer had to be collected and kept for future cleansing. All who were deemed unclean, had to wash themselves and their clothes outside the camp. After this washing they were allowed to meet God at the Tabernacle. In other words, the ceremonial cleansing signified to them that they had access to the worship of God.

By way of contrast it could be pointed out that, those who are washed by the blood of Jesus, receive forgiveness of their sins and have free access to God. This accords with the explication of Pfeiffer and Harrison: "Just as the ashes of the red heifer ceremonially cleansed a defiled Israelite, so Christ's blood satisfies divine justice, purges a poor sinner's conscience, and restores him to God" (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1990:137).

Seume in his article "Divine propitiation"(1942:99, 469), refers to Numbers 19 and makes it clear that if anybody contracted defilement, even merely through neglect, in whichever way, God took account of the defilement. God provides for cleansing, but can in no case tolerate anything unsuited to His presence. It might seem a hard judgement in an inevitable case, such as one suddenly dying in the tent. However, it was to show symbolically that God judges what is suited to His holy presence or not. Such a person was defiled and could not enter God's Tabernacle.

4.15 Assurance of eternal life through the complete sacrifice of Christ

The blood of the heifer cleansed only the flesh (outwardly); it covered sins, but had to be repeated regularly, annually. In contrast, the blood of Jesus cleanses the conscience (inwardly); it takes away sin, and Jesus became the true sacrifice once for all. As a result, people do not need to offer sacrifices anymore, because Christ came as the complete sacrifice. Therefore, in Christ believers have the assurance of eternal life, as it is clearly stated in Scripture, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (I Jn 5:11).

4.16 Missional significance

4.16.1 AICs in Leandra – challenge and missional opportunity

The goal of missions is to make people disciples of Christ (Mt 28:19). In mission work the Gospel must be proclaimed: Christ as the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tm 2:5) and the only way and the truth and the life, without whom no one comes to the Father (Jh 14:16). The manner in which certain churches of the AICs, and a number of non-believers in Leandra, South Africa, and Africa in large, still perform the cleansing ceremonies, proves that they do not understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ's atoning mission.

The zeal of AIC's members to sacrifice time, resources and efforts to seek cleansing from fear of evil spirits, indicates their need for the assurance of true salvation. The AICs as portrayed in chapter 2 in many ways resemble the Athenians as Paul describe them in Acts 17:22-23 as people who are in every way very religious, worshipping *an unknown God*. In many of their rituals they are like people seeking this God, and perhaps reaching out for Him to find Him, but not realising that God is not far from each one of us humans.

The AICs performing their cleansing rituals in the Leandra area in many ways resemble what Bengt Sundkler (prominent pioneer of research on AICs in South Africa), argues: these people are on the bridge between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity (as referred to by Pobe & Ositelu, 1998; cf also Anderson, 2000; Daneel, 1987; Pauw, 1995).

The fact that the AICs have taken a ritual that originated in African Traditional Religion and attempts to incorporate it into a Christian worship style by referring predominantly to Numbers 19 provides a challenge as well as a unique missional opportunity. The challenge is that they are in many ways still worshipping without a true personal faith of commitment to Jesus Christ. As such they often manifest what Paul points out in Ephesians 2:11 that they are "without hope and without God". If the leaders and followers do not reach the point where they grasp the redemptive-historical implications of Numbers 19, they will probably keep on performing these cleansing rituals within a framework of an animistic worldview, ruled by fear and no assurance of victory over evil spirits.

In this way the AICs provide a unique missional opportunity in the sense that the use of Numbers 19 in their rituals provides a connecting point to contextualise the ministry of the Gospel in their midst.

The challenge and the connecting point underscore the importance of reaching out to the AICs with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as part of the missional calling of the church participating in the mission of God (*missio Dei*). This may help them to understand and grasp the biblical fact of the uniqueness of Christ and salvation through him alone, by the insight that the cleansing ceremonies described in Numbers 19 can only be understood well in the light of its full New Testament meaning in Christ.

Reaching out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who perform cleansing rituals, will teach them that these rituals described in Numbers 19 and elsewhere in the Old Testament, were mere shadows pointing to Christ, who is the Reality. They need to be informed that the animal sacrifices were just pointers to Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away sin, and that he came to deal with sin once for all (Hb 10:4; 7:27). In short, these cleansing rituals were fulfilled in Christ as the sacrificial and victorious Lamb of God (Hb 9:13-14).

4.16.2 Offering the promise of complete cleansing in Christ to non-Christians

In most cases non-Christians, especially those who are ATR believers, regard themselves as ceremonially unclean due to death that has occurred in a family. To deal with ceremonial uncleanness, they use water mixed with ashes and *muti* and the blood of an animal to wash themselves. In other instances, they include a wizard or witch doctor (*sangoma*) to conduct the cleansing ritual. This cleansing is extremely important to them, because they believe that it takes away bad luck, as it appeases the ancestral spirits who have the power to bestow bad or good luck (Rumo, 2013p). Non-Christians who are ATR believers represent the words of Hebrew 2:15 as “those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”.

The corrective can be explained from Numbers 19, that true cleansing and victory over all fear of death is found in Christ. The reason is that Christ’s atonement does not merely cleanse the flesh (outwardly), but the heart of a person (inner being – Hb 9:13, 14). By placing their faith in Christ, non-Christians who come to faith in Christ alone may find true cleansing as He washes the hearts of people by his Word. In other words, they

are sanctified by the truth, “Your word is truth” (Jn 17:17) and thus liberated from their fear of death.

4.16.3 Offering real hope to non-Christians

When non-Christian Jews consider Numbers 19, they know that they would miss a golden opportunity of approaching God in worship and enjoying fellowship with his people. The reason is clear. Within this context individuals would be cut off from the Jewish people and sent outside the camp if they were rendered unclean due to contact with death. Naturally this would have been frustrating for such a non-Christian Jew.

In the same way, African individuals who reads Numbers 19 as if the New Testament does not exist, would be frustrated by the amount of money needed to buy a goat or a cow and to keep an amount aside to pay a *sangoma* for performing the cleansing ritual. If Africans do not have the finances to cover the cost of proper cleansing rituals, such an individual would live in fear of death and angry ancestors who cause all sorts of bad luck in this person’s life. This condition causes real fear, frustration and feelings of hopelessness and even depression as it has been observed among the members of the AIC, when reading Numbers 19 without the connection to the New Testament. This would mean reading Numbers 19 without linking it to Christ’s fulfilment of all the ceremonial laws.

However, real hope is offered, when a non-Christian or AIC member interprets Numbers 19 by keeping an eye on the New Testament, specifically the Book of Hebrews. By focusing on Christ readers come to the understanding that the cleansing ritual of Numbers 19:1-22 was a mere a shadow pointing to Christ who is the Reality. This is accompanied by the insight that the mentioned passage also provides connecting points to gain a deeper understanding of Christ’s victory over death and evil spirits.

In this way the atonement of Christ offers real hope to non-Christians for they do not need to practise cleansing rituals any more when coming in contact with death. What makes people unclean is not on the outside, but that which is on the inside, as Jesus emphasised (Mt 15:16-20). This is how Christ has dealt with ceremonial uncleanness, “Unlike the other priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for sins of the people. He sacrificed for the sins once for all when he offered himself” (Hb 7:27).

Therefore they do not have to live in fear of death, angry ancestral spirits and bad luck when they have had contact with death. All they need is the knowledge in faith that Christ cleanses all who belong to Him from all their sins, by the grace of God. Therefore, a non-Christian who has become a Christian through faith in Christ does not have to be concerned any longer with the laws of cleanness and uncleanness. Such individuals do not have to spend money on a goat or a cow for cleansing rituals. There is also no need any more to live in fear of bad luck for not performing cleansing rituals. Christ performed it on behalf of those who believe in Him. A believer may, therefore, live in new and real hope that Christ offers.

4.16.4 Offering deep comfort to bereaved relatives

In the ATR and in the AIC circles in Leandra, cleansing rituals are also performed to offer comfort to the bereaved. When death occurs it leaves a deep sorrow in the heart of the family and relatives. As a result, they perform cleansing rituals to help them process their grief and to provide comfort. It is true that these individuals do experience some form of comfort by performing cleansing rituals. They would at least know that they have done their duty and played their role, and believe that the ritual would put the dead to rest. However, such comfort is superficial because, after having performed all the prescribed rituals they often lose their comfort when they have bad dreams about the dead and then are compelled to do something for the deceased again.

Believers find real and deep comfort by interpreting Numbers 19 as the law implemented to direct cleanness and uncleanness, before Christ fulfilled the law. Therefore, since Christ has come, the instructions of Numbers 19 have become null and void. The reason is clear. Christ has completely cleansed believers from such uncleanness by his blood and has conquered death in his resurrection. This knowledge in faith can provide Christians true, everlasting comfort because “they are not ignorant about those who fall asleep, and grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thes 4:13).

4.16.5 Conflict resolution not through ceremonies but through mutual forgiveness in Christ

As has been stated previously, cleansing ceremonies are performed for various reasons. These reasons would definitely include conflict resolution. For example, when

the family members, tribes, nations or political parties fight over certain issues, cleansing ceremonies (washing a person with water mixed with *muti* and some blood of an animal, especially a goat) plays an integral part to end feuds and conflict. In such instances Numbers 19 is followed as a guide, particularly by those who practise syncretism (mixing the worship of God and ancestral spirits) as is the case with certain members of the AICs. These rituals have developed into a culture for those who practise it in the ATR. For example, members believe they should perform cleansing rituals to end fights.

Instead of the traditional way to end conflict, Christ has offered a better way of conflict resolution. God has forgiven humans' sins in Christ so that they can forgive one another, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ep 4:32). Moreover, in Christ believers find peace, as the apostle Paul testifies, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace" (Ep 2:14-15).

Families, tribes, nations, and political parties who used to end conflict by performing cleansing ceremonies may be offered a better way of forgiving and having everlasting peace with each other in Christ. The peace and forgiveness of Christ do not permit the old and traditional way of ceremonies to carry on, but rather overshadows it (literally and figuratively).

4.17 Possible sermon outlines from Numbers 19

4.17.1 Theme: God is holy and offers cleansing from sin and death

With the theme mentioned above for a sermon, one of the core aspects of the rationale of the whole ritual can be covered and valid redemptive historical lines drawn to the core of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From this practical applications can be made that will be relevant for people living in animistic contexts.

4.17.2 Introduction

When preaching from Numbers 19, this could be used as one of possible introductions for sermons:

As suggested in chapter 3, God always wishes to be worshipped by his people, but the people can be prevented from truly worshipping God. I, therefore, want to say something about one of the stumbling blocks that may prevent people from truly worshipping God and see how God provides the best way to remove our fears of death and to restore us to true worship.

God always wishes to be worshipped by his people, but the people can be prevented from truly worshipping God. I, therefore, want to say something about one of the hindrances that may prevent people from truly worshipping God and the best way of God to restore us to true worship.

4.17.3 Body

4.17.3.1 The uncleanness of the people of God may prevent their true worship of God

God desires his people to worship him. But this worship can be hindered.

This passage (Nm 19) shows us the main stumbling block that disturbed the joy of genuine worship of God for the people of Israel: The uncleanness of God's people impedes their true worship of God.

The following are sub-points:

- Uncleanness was caused by having contact with the tent in which somebody died.
- Uncleanness was caused by having contact with the vessels that were unclean.
- Uncleanness was caused by touching a bone of a dead human being.
- Uncleanness was caused by touching a grave.
- Uncleanness was caused by having contact with a dead person murdered in the open.
- Uncleanness was caused by having contact with a person whose death occurred through natural causes.

In the Old Testament times, according to Numbers 19, the above-mentioned incidences would bring about uncleanness on all who have had contact with death. Death was

God's punishment for disobedience. Contact with the dead thus associated Israelites with God's punishment and separation from him.

But today, Christians do not become ceremonially unclean if death has occurred in a family. Not at all! Christ has dealt with sin by giving himself on the cross for our sins, and his blood cleanses all our sins. He has fulfilled the cleansing ceremony that was instructed in Numbers 19, and thereby provides a better and complete external as well as internal cleansing (Hb 9:13-14).

4.17.3.2 The provision of God to restore his people to genuine worship

Whenever the worship of God by his people was hindered, he provided a way to restore it. According to Numbers 19, God provided the following:

- Water to perform a cleansing ceremony (vv 18-19).
- A Red heifer that had to be slaughtered and totally burnt.
- This cleansing water was a mixture of ashes of the red heifer and of cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool, which were burnt with the heifer, (vv 5-6), and poured into a vessel with fresh water (vv 8-10; 17-19).
- The cleansing ceremony had to be perfect as it was to take place on the third and seventh days (v 19).
- A clean person was to perform the ritual by using a hyssop branch to sprinkle water (v 18).
- After the cleansing ceremony, the person who was previously unclean was considered as ceremonially clean (v 19).
- The person who was ceremonially cleansed, was restored to the fellowship and worship of God and to his community. On the other hand, those who refuse to undergo ceremonial cleansing was cut off from their community and sanctuary and from God (v 20).

Christ's sacrifice was so perfect that he fulfilled all the requirements of Numbers 19.

- His suffering and crucifixion was a complete sacrifice.

- All the charges against us were nailed to his cross.
- Through his death and resurrection he conquered death and Satan and all evil powers.

4.17.4 Application

Both the AIC and ATR believers do still practise cleansing rituals whenever they have had contact with the dead, or whenever death has occurred in a family. They use Numbers 19 as the key verse when they are performing a cleansing ceremony. Following the directives of this passage, they slaughter a goat and use its blood together with water with ashes to cleanse the family from *isinyama* or *amabhadi*, namely bad luck.

Because Christ has come, those who believe in Him no longer become ceremonially unclean by touching a dead body, as was the case in Numbers 19 and other scriptures in the Old Testament. Today, you do not become unclean by touching a dead body, or a grave, and you do not need to undergo a cleansing ceremony (the mixture of water, the blood of an animal, *muti*, and ashes) for having touched that. Christ cleanses not only the flesh, but our consciences from sin (Hb 9:13-14). Because Christ has come and conquered death and sin by his resurrection, we are made new creatures (2 Cr 5:17). Numbers 19 thus teaches believers the principle of remaining holy as the people of God. Christ is now our holiness because he has overcome sin for us.

4.17.5 Conclusion of a sermon

This sermon could be concluded by repeating the fact that, because God is holy, this gives us confidence that we can be holy as well, for he provides the true cleansing, from within – from sin and death.

4.18 Concluding remarks for chapter four

The final findings, conclusions, and missiological recommendations will be presented in the following chapter (chapter 5). Nevertheless, it is already clear from the research in this chapter that Numbers 19 can only be understood and interpreted in a valid and relevant way if a Christocentric and Christotelic approach is followed.

The three horizons have to be kept in mind, namely (1) the context of the original audience; (2) the post resurrection context of the present interpreter and audience; and (3) the animistic context of AICs in the Leandra district. In this way a relevant sermon can be preached based on Numbers 19 that may enrich the lives of the audience. A Christ-centred, redemptive-hermeneutical and homiletical approach to this text may help AIC's members to be liberated from fear of evil spirits, achieve real eschatological hope, process their grief over the death of loved ones and facilitate conflict resolution and forgiveness in a better way.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, PRACTICAL GUIDELINES, POSSIBLE IMPACT OF CHRIST-CENTRED REDEMPTIVE PREACHING FROM NUMBERS 19, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

5.1 Conclusion

In this chapter the findings of the research will be summarised, practical guidelines suggested, and recommendations for further study proposed on valid ways to interpret Numbers 19 and preach from this section. In addition, the implications will be pointed out for ministry among the AICs in Leandra, Govan Mbeki Municipality and Gert Sibande District.

5.2 Importance of cleansing and purification rituals in the AIC in general and in Leandra, GMM, GSD

The qualitative empirical research revealed that cleansing and purification rituals are wide spread, seen as extremely important and that a specific understanding of Numbers 19 plays a key role in the performance of these rituals in Leandra, Govan Mbeki Municipality (GMM) and Gert Sibande District (GSD).

When using Numbers 19 as the main Biblical support for performing cleansing rituals, the AICs in the district have a twofold aim: (1) to find a point of connection with the traditional African cleansing rites, and (2) at the same time provide for the consolation of the bereaved family and relieve mourners from fear of bad luck and evil spirits. The fact that these churches use Numbers 19 show their attempt to sanctify an old practice without neglecting the traditionally conceived need that it has served in African Traditional Religion. Their interpretation of Numbers 19, allows for a connecting point to the beliefs of people who still see death as a threat of being contaminated with uncleanness when death occurs in a family.

The qualitative empirical research in Leandra, GMM and GSD revealed that also a prevalent reality in this district is widespread traditional fears in African communities that bad luck will enter the lives of people who fail to perform proper cleansing rituals. Therefore, the house and family must be cleansed from bad luck, from uncleanness and “darkness” after a certain period of time. Anderson, (2000) in an article “African Death

beliefs”, points out the widespread belief in Africa that, if the correct funeral and mourning rites are not observed, the deceased would return to trouble the living relatives. People who came into physical contact with a corpse are often regarded as unclean. The items belonging to the deceased should not be used at the time of mourning, such as the eating utensils or the chairs used by the deceased. The practice of slaughtering an animal in cleansing rituals is also a widespread practice in Africa. This is also attached to the “home bringing” rite, which is a common African ceremony (cf. also Idowu, 1973; Sawyerr, 1996; Tempels, 1959).

Therefore, the people perform cleansing rituals, using water mixed with ashes, and *muti* and the blood of a chicken, or a goat or a cow, or sometimes just water mixed with ashes. The water is accompanied by a prayer over the water before the facilitator sprinkles it on the family members and the church building or house where the cleansing ritual is taking place.

Members of the AICs are obliged to perform such cleansing rituals whenever death occurs to get rid of the uncleanness. This cleansing ritual is extremely important to them, due to their belief that it will protect them from bad luck, ward off evil spirits and ensure the protection and blessings of good spirits.

The research also revealed that there are widespread ideas that purification rituals create peace among the members of political parties when there were wars and fights in which many people died. After the fights between the members of the African National Congress and Inkatha Freedom Party in KwaZulu Natal, or two tribes who fought each other such as Amazulu and Amakhosa in Thokoza and in KZN, several leaders called for purification rituals. This was meant to re-associate especially the widows with the members of the community since this was prevented during the period of uncleanness.

5.3 The meaning of purification rituals for the pastors and AIC members in Leandra, GMM and GSD

Pastors and bishops of AIC members believe the cleansing ritual of Numbers 19 will have certain benefits, as discussed below.

5.3.1 It will do away with bad luck

Because of the widespread beliefs that death is accompanied by bad luck, they strongly believe that a cleansing ritual helps them to do away with bad luck.

5.3.2 It will protect them from evil spirits

The members of the AICs also have a belief that ceremonial uncleanness may open a gate to evil spirits, therefore, one may gain protection by undergoing cleansing rituals as described in Numbers 19.

5.3.3 It will restore peace among the members of a family, extended family, or between tribes and political parties

Cleansing rituals are seen as ways to ensure peace with others. For example, the family members generally experience feelings of peace when the ritual is performed after death during ten days after a funeral or at *ihlambo likamama* or *baba*. Sometimes when various tribes and political parties are in constant strife, they may think that it is caused by the spirits of those who died in the war. In other instances when a large number of people have lost their lives through accidents on the roads, leaders call for cleansing rituals to be performed. Thus, it is believed that peace would return when a cleansing ceremony is performed at a home and the dead addressed; or the rituals are performed precisely at the spot where deaths occurred during car accidents or where wars have raged.

5.3.4 It will affirm African identity

Cleansing ceremonies are defended by some leaders as expressions of true African culture as it is regarded as the practice of the forefathers according to the belief in ATR.

5.3.5 It will restore socializing with others

It is believed that cleansing rituals restores the individual to the members of the community. As revealed in the empirical research (chapter 2) the widow is not allowed to visit neighbours during the mourning period and she has to sit in the back seat of a taxi or a bus. After the cleansing ceremony has taken place she is free to socialise with the members of the community again.

5.3.6 It will send you back to your wardrobe

During the mourning period, the widow, in most cases, is assigned to wear mourning clothes only. After the cleansing ritual, she is free to wear normal clothes again. As was indicated, the mourning clothes are burned on the cleansing day.

5.4 The use and understanding of the meaning of Numbers 19 among the majority of the AIC pastors and church members in Leandra, GMM, and GSD Numbers 19 is interpreted and applied literally

They read Numbers 19:1-22 literally and apply the described rituals directly to contemporary Africans without considering the redemptive-historical implications in the light of the grand narrative of the Bible. They apply the content directly as it is provided in the passage, as reported by the interviewees (Radebe, 2013h; Dladla, M. 2013e; Mkotong, 2013b). After reading Numbers 19, they mix water with ashes and pray over it, and then sprinkle it on the members of a family for their cleansing. This would also include the sprinkling of a tent or house in which the ceremony is taking place. Thereafter, the facilitators read sections from Numbers 19 that warn anyone who touches the dead that he/she would be unclean for seven days. For these individuals to be ritually cleansed they need to be washed with water of purification (v 9). The facilitator would then take water mixed with ashes and sprinkle it on all those present in the house or tent. The tent, house or church buildings are also sprinkled during the cleansing ritual, seeing that it is also affected by bad luck and evil spirits as the place in which the night vigil is held. The ritual is followed by prayer for the family members and prayer over the new clothes to be worn by the widow (some do not pray over new clothes, they sprinkle it with water of purification instead). The old ones (mourning clothes) are burnt before the night vigil commences.

The AICs also use Numbers 19 without referring to the Book of Hebrews. Chapter 9 of the Book of Hebrews, which actually explains the fulfilment of Old Testament sacrifices as means for cleansing rituals, is unknown and not used in the AIC cleansing rituals. Their failure to interpret Numbers 19 in the light of Hebrews 9 causes them to keep on practising cleansing ceremonies as merely moralistic and legalistic, sometimes even witchcraft, rituals. When some do use Numbers 19 and refer to the Book of Hebrews, they clearly do not have the insight that the cleansing rituals of Numbers 19 were fulfilled by Christ through his sacrificial death and that his sacrifice was sufficient once

and for all. This implies that no more sacrifices are needed after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

It is also important to point out is that the AICs misread and misinterpret the passage as such. They misunderstand the words: “This regulation is valid for all time to come, both for the Israelites and for the foreigners living among them. You are to observe this rule for all time to come” (Nm 19:10, 21). The members of the AIC understand that these words as present instructions to perform cleansing rituals, and which is valid for times to come. They continue the cleansing practice because they fail to see the discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Another point is that there is no biblical base for their ceremony of “ten days” in their interpretation of Numbers 19. The impression that a cleansing ceremony that was to take place on the “third day and on the seventh day” (vv 12, 19) implies “ten days” is also a misinterpretation. They read the “ten days” cleansing ceremony into the Bible, instead of allowing the verse to speak for itself.

5.1 Practical guidelines for a more valid hermeneutical reading of Numbers 19

5.5.1 What did it really mean for the first-time readers?

The Book of Numbers was written for the Israelites. They were the original recipients of the entire Book, which include chapter 19. The aim of this Book was to teach the Israelites that God is the Lord and that he is holy, and that his people should also be holy and do not bring disgrace to his name by contact with the dead. (vv 1-22)

God points out in Numbers 19 that any of the Israelites who have contact with the dead, touch a grave, or enter the tent in which death occurred would become ceremonially unclean. The uncleanness of such individuals would prevent them from approaching God and would separate them from the entire Israelite community, seeing that they would be sent outside the camp – the dwelling place of the ceremonially unclean – until the cleansing ceremony is completed.

To clean the unclean, God in his grace provided the purification water (v 9) to remove ritual uncleanness. The purification water here was mixed with the ashes of the “red heifer” that was slaughtered outside the camp (vv 2- 9, 17-19). Any cleansed Israelite was to take the water of purification and sprinkle on the unclean on the third and

seventh day. After this cleansing those who were previously considered as ceremonially unclean, was then rendered ceremonially clean. This meant that such a person was granted full right to approach God and be restored to both God and his community.

2.17.2 How did it find its fulfilment in Christ?

Numbers 19 finds its fulfilment in Christ as explained in chapter 3. Christ took the place of all sacrifices, including the sacrifice of the red heifer in Numbers 19. Christ became the final sacrifice once and for all.

2.17.3 According to redemptive-historical interpretation

Chapters 3-4 explained how the method of redemptive-historical progression could be used to preach Christ from Numbers 19. According to this interpretation the message of the passage needs to be examined in the light of the bigger picture of redemptive history. From the onset the passage is about people becoming unclean through contact with death.

As explained in chapter 3, death came as result of Adam's fall into sin (Gn 3). From then on death and sin have been closely connected because sin caused death. From then on people died as the result of sin. Death will always be a reality as long as humans live in mortal bodies. In Numbers 19 it is clear that death was still a human problem, seeing that whosoever had contact with death was rendered unclean. Death will remain part of humanity until the second coming of Christ. After the second coming death will no longer plague humans, as there will be no more death on the new earth (Rv 21:4). To deal with the uncleanness of people caused by death, God by his grace provided water of purification mixed with the ashes of a heifer to cleanse those belonging to Him. After they had been sprinkled with this water they became ceremonially clean (Nm 19) and could worship together with God's people.

2.18 Valid application of a typological understanding of the red heifer in Numbers 19

God commanded his people to slaughter the red heifer in order to use its ashes as part of the "water of purification" (v 9). This water cleansed all who were previously ceremonially unclean due to contact with the dead. Those who were cleansed were

then restored to God. This cleansing ceremony of the red heifer typifies the complete cleansing that Christ has accomplished by his blood (Hb 9:13-14).

5.7 Placing key aspects of Numbers 19 in a framework of central longitudinal themes of the grand narrative of the Bible

God commanded many sacrifices to take place in the Old Testament. This includes, inter alia, burnt offering, sin offerings (Lv 1-7) and the sacrifice of a red heifer for cleansing rituals as described in Numbers 19. These sacrifices were mere shadows pointing to Christ who was to come and die on the cross for the sins of the world. After Christ has come the sacrifice of the red heifer for the cleansing ritual has come to an end. Unlike the blood and ashes of the red heifer that washed the flesh (outwardly), the blood of Christ washed away all sins and cleansed the consciences once for and all without repeating it time and again, as was the case with a red heifer (Hb 7:27; 9:13-14). However, God still expects our sacrifices that are different from that of Numbers 19. The sacrifices we now ought give to God are ourselves as living sacrifices (Rm 12:1-2), and that of praises: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Hb 13:15). This provides the assurance: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pt 2:9).

5.8 New Testament contrasts

According to Numbers 19 the sacrifice of a red heifer was commanded for the cleansing rituals of the people of God. However, this cleansing ritual of a red heifer was valid only until the coming of Christ, thereafter, this law has expired. The reason is that all sacrifices, including that of a red heifer for cleansing ceremonies, only cleansed outwardly and as such were shadows pointing to Christ. He came to clean people’s hearts and conscience through his death on the cross.

5.9 Encourage the study of the Book of Hebrews to see Old Testament laws fulfilled in Christ

An effective hermeneutical strategy would be to encourage the study of the New Testament for a deeper understanding of the Old Testament. In this case the focus is on reading the Book of Hebrews to understand the Old Testament ceremonial laws.

Regarding this strategy, the words of Augustine the Church Father springs to mind, “The New is in the Old concealed, The Old is in the New revealed” (Adeyemo, 2006:1490).

Ceremonial laws are laws that Israel practised and that were binding to them. The Israelites had to practise these directives as ceremonial laws. These laws provided for: animal sacrifices for cleansing rituals from contact with the dead (Nm 5; 19); ritual feasts such as burnt offerings (Lv 1), grain offerings (Lv 2), fellowship offerings (Lv 3), sin offerings (Lv 4 – 5), and guilt offerings (Lv 5 – 6). It also informed dietary laws (Lv 11, Dt 14), birth purification (Lv 12) and cleansing from leprosy (Lv 13 – 15).

All these mentioned ceremonial laws are no longer binding for the present-day church of Christ. They were shadows of Christ and were fulfilled in Him. The fulfilment of these animal sacrifices becomes clear when these ceremonial laws in the Pentateuch are compared with the teaching in the Book of Hebrews.

Moreover, the ritual feasts, are also fulfilled in Christ, “Sacrifices and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O, God ...’” (Hb 10:5-18). Animal sacrifices were a mere symbol of the salvation that Christ would provide fully (Hb 9:9; 10:1). These sacrifices did not really take away sin and provide salvation. They were just covering sins temporally (Hb 10:4).

Christ’s atonement has done away with sacrifices. This does not mean that the church of Christ should not read and preach from ceremonial passages such as Leviticus and Numbers. Clergy can, for instance, read and preach from Numbers 19. But the difference with the Israelites and the church of Christ is that the latter should not prescribe to people and force them to keep these rituals in the way the Israelites did. The church should look for the principles underlying cleansing rituals, which is holiness, and practise this principle.

5.10 Practical guidelines for preaching from Numbers 19 in an African context

5.10.1 Empowering church leaders to prepare Christ-centred redemptive sermons from Numbers 19

It is necessary and possible to preach Christ-centred redemptive sermons from Numbers 19. For the church leaders to do so, the following ten steps from Greidanus (1999: 279-316) can be suggested and applied to Numbers 19.

1. Select a textual unit with an eye to congregational needs.

Numbers 19 could be used to address the fear of death and defilement, the fear of bad luck, and provide comfort after the death of relatives.

2. Read and re-read the text in its literary context.

The literary context of Numbers 19 has been provided in chapter 3 for reading Numbers 19 in its literary context

3. Outline the structure of the text.

The outline of the structure of Numbers 19 has been provided in Chapter 3

4. Interpret the text in its own historical setting.

The historical setting for interpreting Numbers 19 correctly has been provided in Chapter 3

1. Formulate the text's theme and goal.

The textual theme:

One of the possible textual themes of Numbers 19 could be formulated as follows:

Israel was supposed to learn from Numbers 19 that God is holy, and that his people should also be holy by avoiding contact with the dead

The textual goal:

One of the possible ways to formulate the textual goal of Numbers 19 is that it was to teach the Israelites and the aliens living among them about the purity and the holiness

of God. In addition, it was to reveal God's love and care for his people by providing a way to restore their fellowship with God

2. Understand the message in the contexts of canon and redemptive history.

The message can be better understood in the context of canon and redemptive history by revisiting chapter 3.

3. Formulate the sermon's theme and goal.

Sermon's theme:

When preaching from Numbers 19 in an African context, the following could be four possible themes and goals for sermons:

1. God is holy and offers cleansing from sin and death through His son Jesus Christ.
2. The holy God protects believers from all uncleanness and possible evil.
3. The holy God provides true comfort through His Holy Spirit to His people after the death of relatives.
4. God is holy and offers cleansing from sin and death.

Sermon's goal:

Based on the four possible themes above, Numbers 19 could be used to provide comfort after the death of relatives. In addition, it can be used to offer the hope of cleansing from sin and uncleanness.

8. Select a suitable sermon form.

Law is a possible form in which to cast the message of this sermon.

9. Prepare the sermon's outline.

This is the final step before a preacher can write the sermon. Here the sermon should be outlined. As pointed out in chapter 4, a normal sermon should consist of: a theme, introduction, body, and conclusion. This structure should also be employed here as a possible outline when preaching from Numbers 19

10. Write the sermon in an oral style.

Explaining oral style in writing the sermon, Greidanus (1999: 292) points out, “The sermon should be written in oral style. In contrast to written style, oral style is characterized by short sentences, vivid words, strong nouns and verbs, the active voice, narration in the present tense, memorable images, and moving illustrations.”

5.10.2 Empowering church leaders to deliver Christ-centred redemptive sermons from Numbers 19

Once the preacher has prepared the sermon, it is not complete until it is delivered to the hearers. For delivering the sermon, De Klerk and Van Rensburg (2005: 141-144) mention four applicable methods, as explicated below.

1. Reading the sermon

This happens when the preacher reads the full text of the sermon from behind the pulpit.

2. Memorising the sermon

The delivering of this sermon takes place after memorising it.

3. Preaching from a framework

This method focuses on key words and concepts.

4. Unprepared preaching

A preacher delivers an unprepared sermon.

The methods mentioned above have advantages and disadvantages. These are explicated briefly below:

➤ Reading the sermon

Advantages:

- less stress;
- better sleep the previous night;

Disadvantages:

- Provides less eye contact with the congregation.
- Creates a clinical feeling about the message.
- Tends to be monotonous and thus causes the congregation to lose interest.

➤ **Memorising the sermon**

Advantages:

- better eye contact with the congregation;
- more freedom to use gestures;

Disadvantages:

- When one word is forgotten, there is a risk that everything can be forgotten.
- When there is little regard for the difference between writing and speaking styles, it might be disturbing.

➤ **Preaching from a framework**

Advantages:

- It is very reliable when the preparation was good.
- Ensures good eye contact.
- Enables the use of gestures.

Disadvantages:

- There is a high risk of repetition.
- Preparation time is much longer and more intensive.

➤ **Preaching unprepared**

- This method is unacceptable. It should be avoided, because the preacher cannot fulfil his/her responsibility to minister God's Word.

Delivering of sermons includes the following aspects:

1. *The use of one's voice*

The voice is a good instrument as preacher. The use of the voice includes the right volume, tone, tempo, articulation, pauses, and voice variation.

2. *Gestures*

Gestures should be meaningful. The preacher should keep gestures as natural as possible.

3. *Eye contact*

The preacher should keep eye contact with their listeners. The flow of the eye contact should be kept balanced between the right and left flank of the congregation.

5.11 Possible impact of Christ-centred redemptive preaching from Numbers 19

5.11.1 For a deepening understanding of the basic message of the gospel

Christ-centred redemptive preaching and teaching from Numbers 19 may provide certain gains as explained below.

Christ present in the Old Testament: Such a perspective helps one see that Christ is present in the Old Testament although veiled in shadows, as Christ himself asserts, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" (Lk 24:44). The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, are three main categories of the Hebrew Old Testament (cf. Lk 24:44). In short, Jesus declares that the whole of the Old Testament speaks about Christ. Reading the Bible in this manner helps one to realise that the gospel is not found in the New Testament only, but the whole Bible proclaims God's mission (the *missio Dei*) to restore broken relations with Him, and to restore the whole of creation from sin and destruction.

Ceremonial laws ended: It helps one see that the ceremonial laws, including that of Numbers 19, have come to an end in Christ.

The only salvation: It also opens the way to warn Africans who deny the once-and-for-all sufficient sacrifice of Christ and return to their old cultural ways of sacrifices. Such individuals will not be saved since salvation is through the sacrifice of Christ only. The

writer of Hebrews states it strongly, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of aging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace” (Hb 10:28-29).

5.11.2 For the bereaved mourners of extended family members.

Preaching Numbers 19 from a Christ-centred redemptive point of view provides both mourners from the family and extended members with real spiritual rest and emotional comfort in Christ. They might come to realise that there is no need for cleansing rituals after death has occurred, for Christ has become the last and final sacrifice who washes people with his own blood. Those who see Christ will find rest for their souls as Christ himself promised, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).

This perspective also gives mourners comfort from the truth that Christ died in their place to save them from sin and the heavy load of cleansing rituals. Drawing lines from Numbers 19 to the victory of Christ over death through his resurrection will help members of AICs not to “grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thes 4:13-14).

On a practical note, this perspective helps all people, not only mourners, to save money as they will not have to spend it on cleansing ceremonies or presents anymore.

5.11.3 For people living in fear of witchcraft and bad luck of spirits hanging over them and their homes

The empirical research reported in chapter 2 revealed that most Africans who keep on performing cleansing rituals do it out of fear of evil and witchcraft. Witchcraft, by definition, is “a satanic spiritual power practised by thousands of people, knowingly or otherwise” (Semenya & Letsosa, 2013). They fear that, if they do not perform cleansing rituals, they will experience more misfortune and bad luck and be attacked by the evil

spirits. By leading them to a Christ-centred redemptive understanding of Numbers 19, this fear can be taken away and help them trust in Christ's victory over all evil spirits because he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them through the cross (Col 2:15).

The cleansing ceremony was fulfilled in Christ in the sense that the ritual concerning the ashes of the red heifer was pointing to the real cleansing of Christ that takes away people's sin once and for all (Hb 7:27). The sacrifice of Christ frees people from fear of sin as He took away sin. As a result, a Christ-centred understanding and application of Numbers 19 frees people from all kinds of fear, including that of witchcraft bad luck, and evil spirits.

Through a Christ-centred redemptive understanding of Numbers 19, members of AICs can be led to understand that "God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heavenly realms to be above all rulers and authorities, powers and dominions. He also put everything on earth under the feet of Christ" (Ep 1:20-22). To believe that everything has been put under the feet of Christ, makes it clear that witchcraft, bad luck, and evil spirits have also been overcome. This helps believers to understand why Christ comforts, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Mt 10:28). Christ liberates people from all fears and bonds, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (Jh 8:36).

5.11.4 For empowering Christians as witnesses of hope in times they have to go through the shadows of death

The Good News needs to be shared with others, as Christ commanded in Matthew 28:19. Therefore, Christians need to bear in mind: When Numbers 19 is understood in the full light of Christ's atonement it can be a connecting point to bring hope to those who are without hope when death occurs. Through Christ hope is restored, even in the midst of death. Through Jesus' resurrection from the dead he conquered death, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of the wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Ac 2:23-24).

Christ has united us to him in faith so that through him, we also become conquerors of death and evil. Therefore Paul reminds us, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, no depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rm 8:37-39).

5.12 Recommendations for further study

The researcher was not aware that the AICs calculate the “ten days” cleansing rituals by adding the third day and the seventh day which they interpret to mean three days plus seven days from the following texts in Numbers 19: “He must purify himself with water on the third day and on the seventh day” (vv 12, 19). Further study and comparison between the meaning of this passage in the Pentateuch and in the ministry of the AICs might provide more material to enrich the spirituality of members from the AICs.

A clearer distinction should be made between typology and typologising, specifically within AIC contexts. From the study it became evident that the AICs do not understand the difference between these two methods of application. In some cases clergy believe they use typology when they are actually typologising and allegorising the text. For example, the idea that the “red cord” (Jos 2:17, 21) points to the blood of Christ, is typologising. Some interpreters mistakenly read references to Christ into Numbers 19 and other Old Testament passages that actually distorts the meaning those passages had for the first audience.

A more in-depth study is needed of how the AICs can be enriched and enhanced to become a missional force in Africa. This might open up an avenue for new Missiological Studies and opportunities for valid contextualisation of the ministry of the Gospel in Africa.

A further theme is the possible savings and alternative investment of financial resources if the elaborate funeral and mourning rituals in many parts of Africa can be toned down. This can provide a different angle of approach in dealing with poverty and economic development. It might also introduce a very fruitful study in community development in the pursuit of integral mission and actualising the *missio Dei*.

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APPENDIX A: MAP OF AFRICA



Continent: Africa

Size: second largest continent in the world

Number of countries: 53 countries

Location of SA: SA is located on the south of Africa

APPENDIX B: MAP OF SOUTH AFRICA



Location: southern base of Africa

Area: 1,218,363 sq km

Peoples:

Black African 79.1%

White: 8.9%

Coloured: 8.9%

Asian: 2.8%

Other: 0.3%

Languages: 11

Number of Christian denominations of the AICs that practise cleansing rituals in

SA: 543

APPENDIX C: MAP OF SOUTH AFRICAN PROVINCES



MAP OF SOUTH AFRICAN PROVINCES

Provinces: South Africa has nine provinces: Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Free State, North West, and Limpopo.

APPENDIX D: LEANDRA IN MPUMALANGA PROVINCE



Name: Leandra was known before as Leslie. Leslie was changed to Leandra, which is a combination of Leslie and Eendrag.

Municipality: Govan Mbeki Municipality

District: Gert Sibande

Province: Mpumalanga

Location: Leandra is located 57 km south east of Springs; east of Johannesburg, SA.

Religion: Christianity is the leading religion at Leandra. There are approximately 40 AICs that still practise cleansing rituals according to Numbers 19:1-22.