

The Heavenly High Priest

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols" Ezekiel 36:25 NASB

The prophets often depict the great spiritual blessings of the Christian age in figurative language based on the practices of the Mosaic worship system. Ezekiel 36 contains a number of such prophecies. Several things in Ezekiel 36:25 are worth noting.

First, God is speaking. It is God himself who sprinkles the people. In so doing, he is performing the role of a priest. Those who *sprinkle* in the Old Testament are the priests, the sons of Aaron. So Ezekiel foresees a day when God Himself will take upon Himself the role of a priest. The New Testament passages that proclaim Jesus to be our great high priest, then, are really asserting his divinity.

Second, it is *clean* water that is sprinkled. Most commentators link Ezekiel 36:25 with the water of purification in Numbers 19. That water was used ceremonially to purify those who were contaminated by touching something dead. The water of Numbers 19, however, was anything but clean. A closer tie can be forged with the ceremony of Numbers 8:7 where Moses was told to sprinkle "purifying water" (lit., water of sin) upon the Levites to effect their cleansing and consecration. The implication is that God's people in the Christian age will be spiritual Levites.

Third, the cleansing that the sprinkling of God brings is inward. It cleanses from "filthiness" and "idols." The Old Covenant cleansings had to do with physical defilement. Our great heavenly high priest, however, cleanses us from the greater defilements of the heart and will.

In Hebrews 10:22, the writer exhorts Christians to draw near to God in priestly service "having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water." The first half of this verse probably refers to Ezekiel 36:25, the second half to Leviticus 8:6 where the priests, the sons of Aaron, had their bodies washed in preparation for their priestly service. When we obey the gospel in Christian baptism, Christ, our heavenly high priest, prepares us inwardly and outwardly for priestly service. Not only are we the New Covenant Levites, we are God's priests on earth as well.