

Hukat

הקת

“Regulation”

Numbers 19:1 – 22:1

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion tells of the sin that would keep Aaron and Moses out of the Promised Land, the death of Aaron and Miriam, and other events in the lives of the Israelites. It is possible that the events detailed in this portion cover a majority of the forty years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness.

1. The Water of Cleansing - 19:1-22

a) Describe the process for obtaining the ashes of the red heifer. What were the characteristics of a suitable animal? Where was it slaughtered? What was the role of the priest? Who gathered the ashes? What was done with them?

An unblemished red heifer never used for work was given to Eleazar the priest. (It was taught that if more than 2 hairs on the heifer were not red, then the animal was not suitable.) The heifer was taken outside the camp where it was slaughtered in the presence of Eleazar. Some of its blood was sprinkled toward the front of the tent of meeting and the entire animal was burned along with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool. Another ceremonially clean man gathered the ashes and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp.

b) What was the ceremonial status of the men who participated in the process? What was done to correct this situation?

The men who participated in this process were ceremonially unclean and had to bathe and wash their clothing, remaining unclean until evening.

c) The ashes of the red heifer were called ashes of purification. What was their purpose? Exactly how were they to be used?

The ashes were mixed with fresh water and used as “water of purification.” When a person came in contact with a dead body, that person was unclean for 7 days. A ceremonially clean person (usually a priest) sprinkled the “water of purification” on the unclean person on the 3rd and 7th days; then he bathed, washed his clothes and was clean that evening.

Ceremonial Cleansing

When a person came in contact with a dead body, he or she became ceremonially unclean.

The elaborate process described in the passage serves to further train the priests (and the people of Israel) to discern between clean and unclean. God clearly wants us to understand the importance He places on ritual cleanliness.

Red Heifer Symbolism

Compare the sacrifice of the red heifer with the sacrifice of *Yeshua*. For example, where were both sacrifices to be offered? What was the blood of each sacrifice to be used for? Can you find any other interesting parallels?

Why is this Passage Here?

In the previous chapter, we read about Korah's rebellion and the death of over 15,000 people. So there is a high likelihood that people would have come into contact with dead bodies. It seems appropriate that the description of the process required to cleanse a person after contact with a dead body be placed at this point in the narrative.

Scripture Link:

Does it seem unusual to you that the Israelites would again be complaining so soon after Korah's rebellion? It is possible that this event involved a new generation nearly 40 years after Korah's demise. By comparing **Numbers 20:22-29** with **Numbers 33:38**, one can conclude that the incident described in this passage occurred toward the end of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

d) What was the status of anyone who came in contact with a dead body? What were the rules when someone died in a tent? What process was followed to correct this?

People and furnishings in a tent (or house) where a person died are similarly unclean for 7 days. The same process was followed for the tent & furnishings.

e) What was the status of the one who sprinkled the water of purification? Does this seem logical to you? Can you see any symbolism in this process?

The person who sprinkled the "waters of purification" became unclean until evening. This seems contradictory until you realize that there are 2 levels of uncleanness: the most serious level when one comes into contact with a dead body (7 days), but a lesser level of uncleanness from contact with the dead heifer's ashes. (Note: The Rabbis believe that there have only been 9 red heifers used for this purpose since this ordinance was given and that the 10th red heifer will be sacrificed by the Messiah.)

2. Water from the Rock - 20:1-13

a) Where did the events in this passage take place? At what time of the year did they occur? What important events occurred here? **These events occurred at Kadesh in the Desert of Zin (southern Negev). They occurred in the first month, Nissan, probably April. Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died here. Numbers 33 lists the travels of the Israelites. A close look at Numbers 33:38 can lead one to conclude that the Israelites spent most of their 40 years in the wilderness camped at Kadesh.**

b) What were the people complaining about in verses 2-5? Does this seem familiar? Were the same people as usual complaining? What did Moses and Aaron do?

The people were complaining about the lack of water. This is the typical "we should have stayed in Egypt" refrain. However, since this occurred near the end of the 40 years, it is a new generation that is complaining. Moses and Aaron again "fell facedown" in front of the Tabernacle to seek God.

c) What exactly were God's instructions to Moses and Aaron? What exactly did they do? How closely did they follow their instructions? **God told Moses to take the staff (Aaron's?), gather the people, speak to the rock, and water would pour out. Moses and Aaron took the staff and gathered the people, but instead of speaking to the rock Moses said, "must we bring water out of this rock?" and then struck the rock with the staff.**

d) What was God's complaint to Moses and Aaron? What was the consequence of their actions? Does this seem appropriate to you?
God said that Moses and Aaron did not trust Him enough to honor Him as holy in the sight of the Israelites. Because of this, God said that Moses and Aaron would not lead the people into the Land. This seems rather harsh.

e) Why was the name given to this place appropriate? How did God "show himself holy among them" (verse 13)?
The place was named Meribah, meaning quarreling, which the people had done with Moses & Aaron. God showed himself holy by holding Moses and Aaron accountable for their failure to follow his instructions.

3. Edom Denies Israel Passage - 20:14-21

a) Which direction were the Israelites headed when they sought passage through Edom? What lay ahead of them beyond Edom?
From Kadesh to Edom is east then north. Beyond Edom to the north lay Moab and then Ammon and the kingdom of Amorites.

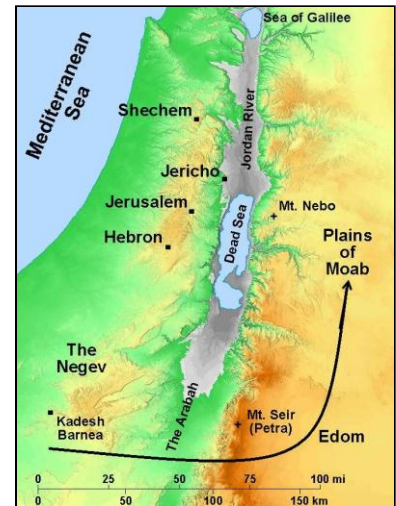
b) Why was it appropriate for Moses to identify the Israelites as the brother of Edom? What exactly did Moses request of them?
Edom was settled by Jacob's brother Esau and his descendants. Jacob became Israel. The Israelites asked only for passage through Edom.

c) Why do you think the Edomites refused the Israelites passage? How did the Edomites back up their words? What did the Israelites do?
Many reasons are possible; the Edomites may not have trusted the Israelites or they may have been concerned with the warring Amorites to their north. In any case, they came out with their army and the Israelites turned away.

4. The Death of Aaron - 20:22-29

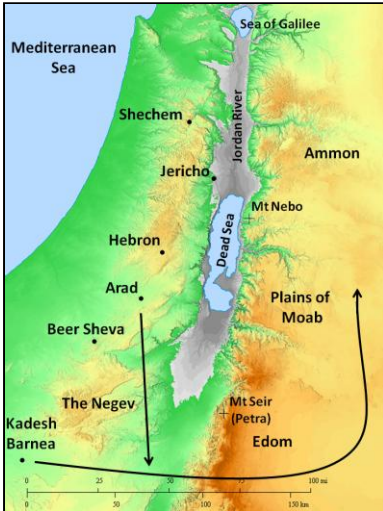
a) Where did the Israelites go after leaving Kadesh? Where was this in relation to Edom?
The Israelites went from Kadesh to Mount Hor near the border of Edom (near today's Petra).

b) What did God tell Moses and Aaron would happen here? What was God's reason that Aaron would not enter the land? About how old do you think Aaron was at this time?
God told Moses & Aaron that Aaron would die there and would not enter Erez Israel because of his rebellion at Meribah (see #2 above). Aaron was older than Moses and they left Egypt when Moses was about 80. Add 40 years for wandering in the wilderness and Aaron was probably about 125 years old.



The Israelites headed east then north toward Moab and Ammon. Today Petra is located in Edom and the capital of modern Jordan is Amman, located in the ancient land of Ammon.

Why did the Israelites call themselves the brother of Edom?
Edom (which means "red") was the name for the land that Jacob's brother Esau settled after Jacob deceitfully obtained the blessing of the firstborn from their father, Isaac. To review, see **Genesis chapter 27, 32:3, and chapter 36.** Since Jacob (who became Israel) and Esau (who became Edom) were brothers, such terminology was appropriate.



As they traveled east toward Edom, the Israelites were attacked by the king of Arad. The small town of Arad still exists in Israel today and may be near the location where the king of Arad lived.

Always Complaining

Even after 40 years, it seemed like the Israelites were never able to break the habit of complaining. This was symptomatic of a deeper problem: distrust or lack of faith in God. However, God showed great patience with the Israelites and never stopped trying to teach them that they could trust in Him. How patient is our God!

c) Who went up on Mount Hor? What was done with Aaron's high priestly garments? Who came down from Mount Hor? What are your feelings about this story?

Aaron, Eleazar (his son), and Moses went up on Mount Hor. Aaron's priestly garments were put on Eleazar and only he and Moses came down.

5. Arad Destroyed - 21:1-3

a) Where did the Canaanite king of Arad live? From which direction did they come to attack the Israelites?

Arad lived in the Negev, where Kadesh was. They would have come east or northeast to attack the Israelites

b) What vow did the Israelites make to God at this time? Did they keep their vow? How was the name given to the place appropriate?

The Israelites vowed (dedicated to God) the cities of these Canaanites if God would deliver them into their hands. They did indeed destroy the cities of the Canaanites and called the place Hormah, meaning destruction.

6. The Bronze Snake - 21:4-9

a) As the Israelites left Mount Hor, where were they headed? What did the people do? Has this happened before?

From Mount Hor, the Israelites headed southeast (toward the Red Sea) to go around Edom. They would then head east and north coming to Moab from the southeast. The people complained to both God and Moses about the lack of food and water. This seemed to be a common complaint.

b) What was God's punishment for their rebellion? How did the people respond? Does this seem typical?

God sent venomous snakes among them and many were bitten and died. The people came to Moses and repented, asking him to pray that the snakes be removed. (This new generation seemed quicker to repent than their fathers were.)

c) What were God's instructions to Moses to save the people? How was this response by God appropriate for the people's sin? Do you see any symbolism here?

God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole that anyone who is bitten may look at it and not die. The people's sin was again lack of faith; it required faith to believe that merely looking at the snake on the pole would keep them from dying. (See "Digging Deeper" question at end for symbolism.)

7. The Journey to Moab - 21:10-20

a) Can you trace their path as the Israelites traveled around Edom? From what direction did they approach Moab? Can you locate the river valleys beside which they camped on a map? Can you locate any of the other places mentioned in this passage?

The Israelites would have left Mount Hor going south then turn east and head north around the east side of Edom approaching Moab from the southeast. The Zered and Arnon rivers are still very identifiable on modern maps of Jordan. Mount Pisgah is also shown on many maps.

b) What do you think the “Book of the Wars of YHWH” was?

This is the only mention of the “Book of the Wars of YHWH” in the Bible. (There are other books mentioned in the Old Testament but not included in the Bible.) It is believed to be a collection of war songs that were passed down orally and finally written down for preservation.

8. Defeat of Sihon and Og - 21:21 - 22:1

a) When the Israelites camped on the northern border of Moab, they faced two potential enemies, one to the northwest and one to the northeast. Who were they?

The Amorites (who had been waging war with the Moabites) were located to the northwest and the Ammonites were located to the northeast.

b) To whom did the Israelites send a message requesting passage through their land? Were they allowed passage? What happened? According to verse 31, what was the final outcome? How does this relate to **Genesis 15:16**?

The Israelites sought passage through the land of the Amorites which was on the way to Erez Israel. Sihon, king of the Amorites refused passage to the Israelites and went to war with them. Israel prevailed and captured the cities of the Amorites. In Genesis 15:16, God speaks of the sin of the Amorites and implies their future destruction.

c) Which direction did the Israelites go after the encounter with Sihon? Who did they encounter next? What was the result of this encounter?

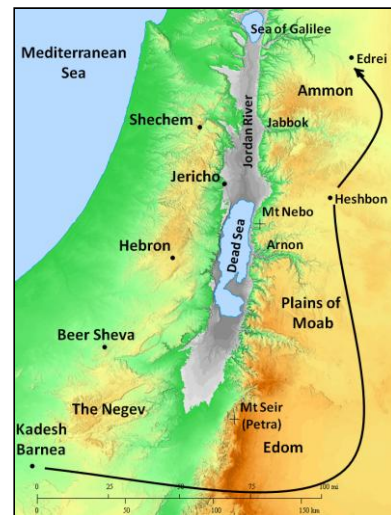
The Israelites continued north where they encountered Og, king of Bashan. They defeated him as they had defeated Sihon.

d) Can you identify on a map the area of land that the Israelites occupied at this time? Do you know other names for this area of land?

The area then controlled by the Israelites was east of the Jordan river extending northward from the northern end of the Dead Sea probably as far as the Sea of Galilee. To the east would have been the Ammonites who had a fortified border (verse 24). This area has been called Bashan, Gilead, and today includes much of northern Jordan and the Golan Heights.

e) Where did the Israelites encamp after defeating Sihon and Og?

The Israelites camped east of the Jordan river across from Jericho.



The Israelites traveled north through Moab toward Ammon, all in present-day Jordan. On the way they encountered Sihon, the king of the Ammorites at Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan at Edrei. They defeated both kings, took over their land and settled in it.

Digging deeper

1. **Numbers 20:9-12** records the story of Moses striking the rock at the waters of Meribah and God's displeasure with him. List some reasons that you think God might have been displeased with Moses. Do you think His punishment was harsh?

God says that Moses and Aaron "did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites" (20:12). Some possible reasons for God's displeasure with Moses could have been a) Moses failed to follow instructions (he hit the rock instead of speaking to it), b) Moses got angry with the people when God apparently was not angry, and c) Moses indirectly took credit for the miracle ("Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (20:10)). We can only trust that God's judgments are just and true and are in the best interest of the person involved. (It could be that Moses was getting old enough that it would have been physically impossible for him to continue.)

2. In **John 3:9-21**, Yeshua refers to the bronze snake that Moses put on the pole in **Numbers 21:4-9**. How does this passage from the *Brit Hadashah* relate to the Numbers story? Also, II Kings 18:1-4 tells what eventually happened to the bronze snake. Why do you think the bronze snake had to be destroyed?

Yeshua was using a story familiar to all Jews to show 2 things: a) how he would be raised up on a pole, like Moses' bronze snake and b), how by looking on that which was raised up (Yeshua & the bronze snake) with faith, God would heal. In the II Kings passage, the bronze snake had become an idol (they had even given it a god's name). God hates idolatry and it had to be destroyed. It is a good example of how even good things given by God can become idols to us.

3. It has been suggested that **Psalm 90** was written by Moses after the deaths of Miriam & Aaron. Does this seem reasonable to you?

In **Psalm 90**, Moses considers the plight of all human beings. In this short psalm, he notes the relative insignificance of our lives in comparison to God. It is a somewhat melancholy discourse on life, yet Moses prays for all of us that we might "sing for joy and be glad all our days." Moses' words seem fitting of an older man who is considering the end of his days on earth.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Judges 11:1-33

Brit Hadashah : John 3:9-21; 4:3-30; 12:27-50