

Notes for Parsha Chukkat: Numbers 19:1 – 22:1

This parsha details the laws of the red heifer, the death of Miriam, the sin of Moses and Aaron and their subsequent punishment, and the death of Aaron. Also included is the king of Edom's refusal to allow the Israelites to pass through his land, another rebellion and finally a war with the Canaanites and the defeat of Og, king of Bashan.

This parsha opens with the laws of the red heifer. The details are given and we are told this will be a permanent law for both the Israelites and the strangers who reside with the people.

The text then switches into laws of death and dealing with a corpse as well as how to purify the deceased's belongings and the tent if the person died inside with the use of ashes from the cleansing fire, fresh water and hyssop.

After this, the narrative continues showing that the Israelites arrived at Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon. In one short sentence, we are told that Miriam died there and was buried there. There is no mourning shown or any additional mention of Miriam after this point. The narrative moves quickly on to state the community was out of water and the people began to grumble. Again, the people bring up Egypt and why Moses brought them out from there to a place with no grain, figs, pomegranates or even water.

It is also at Kadesh that Moses is told by God to take his staff and order the rock to yield water. However, out of apparent frustration, Moses strikes the rock twice with his staff. God chastises Moses and tells him that he will not lead the people into the Promised Land because Moses did not trust God enough to affirm God's sanctity in sight of the people.

After this, Moses send messengers to the king of Edom seeking permission for the people to cross his land. The king refuses and threatens them with the sword. The messengers try a second time, promising to stay to the path and to purchase any food or water they might need. Again, the king refuses and therefore the Israelites go around the borders of Edom.

When the people arrive at Mt. Hor, God tells Moses that it's time for Aaron to "be gathered to his kin." In other words, to die. Aaron is to pass his vestments down to his son, Eleazar on the mountain and then he will be gathered to his kin. When Moses and Eleazar come down the mountain without Aaron, the Israelites realize what has happened and they mourn Aaron for thirty days.

The parsha continues with the incidents that occur as the people skirt around the borders of Edom. There is another rebellious outbreak with subsequent punishment and three military engagements against Arad, the Amorites and Bashan, all of which end in success for the Israelites. These engagements will later be celebrated by the Psalmists who declared them to be victories over "mighty kings." (Psalm 136:17-22)

Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.

The rebellion which occurred, again, brought up the past and Egypt, complaining about the lack of bread and water, their loathing of the manna and worry over whether they will die in the wilderness. This time the punishment sent by God came by way of serpents who moved through the people biting them and killing them.

The first military engagement occurred with the king of Arad engaged Israel in battle and lost the day. The second military engagement occurred when Sihon, king of the Amorites would not allow the Israelites to pass through his land. The Amorites refused and engaged the Israelites in battle. The Amorites lost and the people occupied the land. Next, the Israelites marched toward Bashan where King Og met them in Edrie to engage them in the third military engagement. Again the Israelites won the day and took possession of Bashan.

The parsha ends with the Israelites marching on toward the steppes of Moab where the people camped across the river Jordan and Jericho.