

CHUKAT

NUMBERS (BE'MIDBAR 19:1 – 22:1)

INTRODUCTION:

1. As this portion begins, it addresses the epitome of what *chukat* חֻקֹּת is considered to be – laws that are beyond human understanding.

a. The law of the Red Cow (heifer) is the most puzzling of all.

2. Yet, rabbinical sources are quick to point out that inability to understand is due to limitation of student, not Teacher.

3. One thing we know: this law belongs to group of laws addressed in Lev. 12 – 15 (laws of purification).

a. It provides for removal of defilement resulting from contact with dead.

4. The process was an unblemished heifer never under the yoke was:

- Slain outside the camp.
- Burned with cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet.
- Ashes gathered and dissolved in fresh (literally, חַיִּים *chayim* “living”) water.
- This was sprinkled on those contaminated through contact with a dead body.

5. This is perhaps the strangest rite in all of Scripture in that it is a paradox.

a. Purifies those contaminated while contaminating those who participate in preparation.

b. It purifies the impure and at same time renders impure the pure.

6. In addressing this theme, Midrash quotes Job:

“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!”

7. The fact “one” is *echad* אֶחָד suggests that “No one” could be “Is it not the One?”

a. In other words: Only God can bring something pure from something impure.

b. Abraham was son of Terah; Josiah from Ammon.

8. Something I have always found interesting: pearls from oysters.

a. As far as food goes, oysters are impure.

b. Y’shua alludes to them being “holy” in Matthew 7:6.

c. They are of “great price” in Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13:45).

d. Pearl comprises the gates of New Jerusalem – 12 pearls (Rev. 21:21).

9. Gatekeepers were set at gates to prevent anything unclean from entering (2 Chron. 23:19).

10. Gates of pearl perhaps are to remind us that The One brought something pure from something defiled – as such we are to keep His commands because:

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.” – Revelation 22:14

11. Still, Judaism confesses that we shall never know why this (pure from impure) is so.

a. In regard to this statute, cites Solomon when he said:

“I will be wise; but it was far from me. As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?” Ecclesiastes 7:23-24

12. In some respects, I believe that we can ascertain to a certain point.

- a. Ultimately, we understand Y’shua is the fulfillment of this mysterious ritual.

“For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” – Hebrews 9:13-14

13. Though He has fulfilled the meaning, it still has future application for the time of redemption.

“And I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when I am hallowed in you before their eyes; for I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” – Ezekiel 36:24-28

14. The people of God are being re-gathered (because of Messiah) but are defiled and in need of purification – been in contact with dead (defilement).

- a. Are considered as dead.
- b. Are re-gathered but not on their own merit – but to sanctify His Name.
- c. Must be sprinkled to be clean; given a new heart and breathed upon.
- d. So that we might keep His commandments and inhabit the land promised to us.
- e. According to Rev. 22:14 – that we may enter the gates (pearl) of the city.

15. How does one explain how the Word becoming flesh and dying etc. causes those defiled to be considered righteous?

- a. God is infinite in existence and wisdom: man limited in existence and comprehension.
- b. Just because we cannot understand truth does not make it any less the truth.

CHAPTER 19: THE BURNING OF THE RED HEIFER

1. Some contend the particulars of this chapter have no sequential relationship to chapters before or after.

- a. Tabernacle dedicated on 1 Aviv; Moses oversaw first Red Heifer on following day.
- b. In previous chapter, Tabernacle was already in operation.

2. However, considering the rebellion of Korah and the aftermath, it speaks of purification after contact with “death.”

- a. Furthermore, in previous *parsha*, *kohanim* reminded to safeguard the “holies.”

- b. Were to keep anything contaminated from defiling the *mishkan*.
- 3. Verse 1: “The LORD spoke to Moses and unto Aaron.”
 - a. Aaron included because, believed that Red Cow was to atone for Golden Calf.
 - b. Aaron fashioned the golden Calf.
 - c. The heifer is “red” (Heb. אדמה *adumah*) symbolizing carnality, sin.
 - d. *Admoni* אדמוני is “red” when used for Esau who is אדום Edom.

“Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

– Isaiah 1:18

- d. Heifer never to be under yoke; symbolizing sinner who cast off God’s yoke.
- e. It was burned; Aaron cast gold into fire to produce the calf (Ex.22:24).
- 4. Verse 2: “Bring a red heifer, faultless, ... no blemish and upon which never came a yoke.”
 - a. Hebrew term is פרה אדמה *parah adumah* – a young calf completely red in color.
 - b. There cannot be two hairs of another color or it is disqualified.
 - c. Never been used for a secular purpose – inferring it was “set apart.”
- 5. As believers we see faultless (תמים *tammim*) heifer with no blemish representing Messiah.
 - a. Pilate said, “I find no fault in Him.”
 - b. In addition to this, there is another way to view it.
 - c. Of Y’shua scripture says:

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” – 2 Corinthians 5:21

- 6. The Pure One, in order to make the impure clean, had to be “contaminated” as sin.
 - a. If red is symbolic of sin, He was made “red.”
 - b. אדמה *adumah* is related to אדם *adam* “man” and אדמה *adamah* “ground.”
 - c. The word became “flesh” (ground) and dwelt among us as “last Adam.”
- 7. The word “heifer” - פרה *parah* - suggests fruit that grows unrestrained and flourishing.
 - a. On the surface, this has a positive connotation.
 - b. Yet, פרה *parah* is related to word פרא *para* – “free of control, uninhibited.”
 - c. Is the word translated “wild” in describing Ishmael – Heb. פרא אדם
 - d. Perhaps פרה אדמה *parahadumah* is to accentuate that:

The One who had never behaved in an unrestrained, wild manner (i.e. He who knew no sin) came to exemplify **completely** (was made to be sin) all those who had behaved in a wholly unrestrained manner (for us) that, in so doing, and by His death, He could cause those who were “dead” – impure – to be born again and become the sons of God – pure (that we might become the righteousness of God in Him).

- 8. Verse 3: “You shall give it to Eleazar the kohen; he shall take it outside the camp.”
 - a. It was taken to a deputy – Judaism believes because Aaron took part in Golden Calf.
 - b. It was to be slain by someone else in the presence of the priest.
 - c. Interestingly, Y’shua was slain by another (Romans) in the face of the priest.
 - d. If Golgotha was Mount of Olives – he died facing the Temple.

- e. Miphkad Altar was on the Mount of Olives facing the Temple.
9. Verse 4: “Eleazar shall ... sprinkle of her blood toward the tent of meeting seven times.”
- Eleazar didn't slaughter the heifer.
 - Standing to east of mishkan or the Temple, priest would receive the blood in vessel.
 - Faced the Sanctuary so that he could see it and threw blood in direction of Sanctuary.
 - Again, Y'shua possibly executed on Mount of Olives
10. Interesting to consider that Y'shua shed blood in seven different ways.
- Sweat became blood.
 - Scourged.
 - Beard plucked out.
 - Crown of thorns.
 - Pierced hands.
 - Pierced feet.
 - Lance in side.
11. Verse 6: “Priest shall take cedar, hyssop and scarlet and cast into the burning of the heifer.”
- These are the same elements used in cleansing of leper (Lev. 14:4).
 - People speculate that cedar might have been the wood Y'shua was crucified upon.
 - Hyssop was used to give him sour wine (Jn. 19:29).
 - Romans put a scarlet robe upon Him (Mat. 27:28).
12. Verses 7-8: Those who participate in this become unclean.
- Does this imply that those who participated in Y'shua's crucifixion became unclean?
13. Verse 9: “A man that is clean shall gather up the ashes...and lay them in a clean place.”
- This man didn't participate in the burning of the heifer.
 - The ashes were to be used for a “water of sprinkling” – for the removal of impurity.
 - Once the man came in contact with ashes he is rendered unclean.
14. Everyone, regardless of rank or station, who participated were rendered unclean.
- The ashes represented both sanctification and defilement.
 - This is the paradox of Y'shua:
15. Peter put it this way:

“Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’ and ‘a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.”

– 1 Peter 2:6-8

16. The “stone of stumbling and rock of offense” addresses both “houses of Israel” (Is. 8:14).
- Y'shua adds that the one who falls on this will be broken.
 - The one who the stone falls on will be ground to powder (Mat. 21:44).
 - Reminiscent of Daniel's prophecy in chapt. 2 – stone cut from mountain strikes image.
17. Verses 11-13: Anyone who touches a dead body is unclean for seven days.
- Must be purified with waters of purification on 3rd day and 7th day and “remove sin.”
 - The one who touched something dead and isn't sprinkled with waters remains unclean.
 - Even if they immersed in the *mikveh*, would be considered unclean.
 - Consequently, in this state, they would defile the Sanctuary by coming in contact.

18. Another paradox: Y'shua raised people from the dead by touching them.
- Took the young girl by the hand (Mk. 5:41).
 - Touched the open coffin of the dead man of Nain (Lk. 7:14).
19. Touching the dead required waters of purification; yet He is the Red Heifer personified.
- a. By Him that which was considered "death" is made clean.
 - b. When waters of purification (ashes) contacted unclean; waters not rendered unclean.
 - c. Raising of young girl follows being touched by woman with issue of blood (unclean).
 - d. Previously excluded from Sanctuary but by touching Him, permitted to come in.
 - e. Those infected with death by serpents are made whole by looking on brazen serpent.
 - f. Cursed is one hung upon tree, yet by that we are "born again."
20. How? If defies explanation in our limited understanding – no less true.
21. Unclean must be sprinkled with waters of purification to enter Sanctuary.
- a. His "house" will only permit those who are "clean."
 - b. Not just a physical temple but the House He is building now.

"Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Y'shua the Messiah."

– 1 Peter 2:4-5

22. The priests were given the task of safeguarding the Sanctuary that no unclean would defile.
- a. This is our charge as a "royal priesthood" – in the future New Jerusalem we see:

"But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." – Revelation 21:27

23. Verse 15: "Every open vessel (in a tent where someone died) is unclean."
- a. Outside of a covered area, person would have to come in contact with the body.
 - b. Understood to be an earthenware vessel – contaminated if unclean is inside it.
 - c. Under the tent of a dead person, it is in an environment of death, thus unclean.
 - d. If it were covered, it would not be contaminated because could get inside.
24. This says to me: person (earthen vessel) that is living set-apart and sealed by Holy Spirit can be in an environment of death and not be contaminated: e.g. Abraham among the Canaanites.
- a. The person who is "open" to their surroundings will be contaminated by them.
 - b. In the world but not of the world; light to the nations while in the nations.
 - c. Can't be a light if acting like the nations.
25. At the same time, there is a point when we must come out of contaminated places.
- a. Zechariah 5 – woman in basket (Heb. is *ephah*, "measure") covered with lead weight.
 - b. Basket wouldn't support a lead disc – perhaps an earthen vessel.
 - c. She is described as "wickedness" and put in the *ephah*, meaning it was originally open.
 - d. Thus the vessel is contaminated by her wickedness and taken to land of Shinar.
26. Because of our "openness" are infected with the unclean and, as a result, His people do not inhabit the Land of Promise.
- a. Sent into exile, into "Babylon" the land of Shinar.
 - b. In Revelation 17, that woman is out of the basket and riding the beast.
 - c. At that time God's people are encouraged to:

“Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.” – Revelation 18:4

26. When that happens they must be sprinkled according to Ezekiel 36.

“For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean.”

– Ezekiel 36:24-25

27. Verse 18: “A clean person shall take hyssop, dip it...and sprinkle it upon the tent and all...”

a. That person would have to wash his clothes and if touched water be unclean til even.

b. The person sprinkled (on 3rd day and 7th day) would wash himself and clothes.

c. He would be clean at evening.

28. David alludes to this when, after going to Bathsheba, he wrote:

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Psalms 51:7, 10

29. Notice that a “clean heart” and “steadfast spirit” are reminiscent of what occurs to those who return from the nations in Ezekiel 36 – “a heart of flesh and His spirit within them.”

30. Also worth noting that blood of Pesach lamb was applied to door with hyssop (Ex. 12:22).

31. In the end, those contaminated had no hope were it not for the ashes of the Red Heifer.

a. Coming in contact with corpse was primary source of contamination – happened a lot.

b. They would forever be excluded from entering His House unless cleansed.

32. Mishna says this ceremony was performed seven times:

- Once by Moses.

- Once by Ezra.

- Five times after Ezra.

33. Disappeared after the destruction of Temple which leads to, “How is one cleansed today?”

34. Numbers 19 is read on *Shabbat Parah* (special Sabbath) in month of Adar to allude to cleansing that one might bring Passover sacrifice in state of purity.

a. In other words, Red Heifer rite (cleansing) is linked to Passover (redemption).

b. The *haftarah* on *Shabbat Parah* is Ezekiel 36:16-38 which about returning to land.

35. It would seem that only way to be cleansed and to return to the Land is to embrace the Lamb.

CHAPTER 20: DEATH OF MIRIAM AND STRIKING THE ROCK

1. Rabbinical sources state that this chapter picks up Israel’s story 38 years later.

a. The decree that the generation who believed spies’ report would die is fulfilled.

b. Believed that events of this chapter happened in 40th year of their wanderings.

c. Meaning that the events in the previous 38 years are unrecorded.

2. The condemned were obligated to wander in the desert (some believe Arabia) until they died.

a. One thing they did do was walk – placing their footprints on land.

b. Those not condemned to die were transformed from slaves into a nation.

c. They also gave us an example NOT to follow.

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Messiah. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Messiah, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” (1 Corinthians 10:1-11)

3. Verse 1: “Israel came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month...and Miriam died.”
 - a. The first month meaning Aviv.
 - b. This is the last stage of the journey: Kadesh, to Edom and Pisgah heights.
 - c. Miriam (Heb. מִרְיָם *miryam*), like her brothers, doesn't enter the Land.
 - d. Her death is juxtaposed with the Red Heifer even though separated by many years.
4. Name מִרְיָם *Miryam* is said to mean “bitterness” or “rebellion” from *marah* – מָרָה “oppose.”
 - a. Related to מָרָא *mara* - “expand, enlarge” as “expanding wings in flight.”
 - b. Interesting that *yam* is part of her name – “sea.”
 - c. She led in song after the crossing (flight) through the sea.
5. Legend is that a “well” of water that “followed” them was due to her merit.
 - a. Some traditions make this “well” to be a “rock” that followed them.
 - b. Which we just read of and know to be Messiah.

“Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation (yeshua).” - Isaiah 12:3

6. Interestingly, Messiah Y'shua would be born of a Miryam.
 - a. Tradition states she died on 10 Aviv (day Passover lamb selected).
7. Verse 2: “And there was no water for the congregation” upon her death.
 - a. Leading rabbinical sources to conclude, the well of water ceased upon her death.
8. Verse 3: “And the people strove with Moses... ‘would we have perished with our brethren.’ ”
 - a. Referring to the revolt of Korah.
 - b. Their complaint was not over lack of meat or the monotonous manna, but water.
9. Verse 5: Didn't suggest going back to Egypt but questioned why he brought them from Egypt.
 - a. There is no seed, no vegetation and no water.
10. Verse 8: “Take the rod, assemble the congregation...and speak to the rock before their eyes.”
 - a. Then it would give water to the people, for them and their cattle.
 - b. The same rod used for other miracles including striking the rock at Rephidim (Ex. 17).
 - c. The word translated as “rock” is סֵלַע *sela'* – “elevated rock,” something “lofty, tall.”
 - d. Very closely related to סֵלַח *selah* – “to lift up, to exalt.”
 - e. The definite article suggests it was a rock known to them.
11. Rabbinical sources believe this same rock gave water to Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21:19).
 - a. They believe this same rock is one Moses drew water from 40 years earlier.

- b. Same rock accompanied people through their wanderings while Miriam was alive.
- c. When she died, it stopped yielding water and was hidden.
- d. Again, notice what Paul says in 1 Co. 10:

“They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Messiah.”
– 1 Corinthians 10:4

12. Verse 10: Moses gathered the people before the rock and addressed them as “rebels.”
 - a. Hebrew word is **הַמְרִים** *ha'morim*, literally “the rebels” (*ה* *hei* being definite article).
 - b. Removing the definite article *ה*, left with same letters that render **מִרְיָם** Miriam.
 - c. Odd he refers to them by word that equates to one whose death marked end of water.
 - d. Has been suggested that this word also alludes to **מֹרֶה** *moreh* “teacher.”
 - e. As if to say, “Listen you who think you are to teach your teacher.”
13. Asks the question, “Are we to bring forth water for you out of this rock?”
 - a. Perhaps hinting that he is already perturbed with them.
 - b. Perhaps giving the impression of doubt in front to the entire assembly.
14. Whatever the motivation, Moses struck the rock twice instead of speaking to it.
 - a. Had he spoken to it, God’s name would have been sanctified – no denying His power.
 - b. By speaking, he sanctifies – by striking, he nullifies.
 - c. Because of this act, he nor Aaron permitted to enter the land.
15. Verse 12: He got water from the rock but he did not sanctify His name in sight of the people.
 - a. Which seems to be a greater evil than their disgruntled attitudes – many of them lived.
 - b. His judgment in error couldn’t be winked at in light of what had been entrusted to him.
 - c. If was equated to not believing Him – same fault as those who listened to spies’ report.
16. Verse 13: “These are the waters of Meribah where Israel strove with the LORD.”
 - a. Waters of strife: this occurrence became known as Meribah Kadesh.
 - b. This to distinguish from episode recorded in Exodus 17:7
 - c. “He was sanctified in them (the people)” in spite of Moses’ action, water was given.
 - d. Also that He was not a respecter of persons in punishing Moses and Aaron.
17. Commentators struggle with Moses’ actions and how it constituted sin and how the consequences fit the crime.
 - a. Ramban said, “The matter is a great secret of the mysteries of the Torah.”
 - b. Rambam said, it was because of his anger; the people saw that as a reflection of God.
 - c. Rashi interprets it as simply he struck the rock instead of speaking to it as commanded.
 - d. Another commentator says the sin is hinted at by the phrase “before their eyes.”

“Implying that Moses had to speak to the rock in such a way that the people would see something, rather than merely know it.... Meaning that their understanding of that experience went beyond the normal limitations of human physicality.... If they could achieve that perception, the barriers to belief would fall away and that nation could rise to new heights. The water flowed but Moses failed to inculcate them with this perception.”

18. If Messiah is the Rock, Moses struck Him twice instead of once at Rephidim.
 - a. As a consequence, the people could not perceive what they were to see.
 - b. They didn’t and can’t see the Messiah.

CHAPTER 20: EDOM REFUSES TO LET ISRAEL PASS

1. Verse 14: Moses sent messengers to King of Edom seeking passage.
 - a. Edom refused to let them pass.
 - b. This in spite of fact Moses promised that Israel would remain on highway.
 - c. He promised Israel would take nothing from them at all.
2. Though Israel could have invaded and destroyed Edom, they pass around Edom.
 - a. God had commanded them not to engage their kinsman (Deut. 2:4-5).
 - b. This forces them to come into the country of the Amorites: Sihon and Og.
 - c. This puts them on the path to come into the land at same point Abram entered.
3. Should be noted that even though Moses reminds them of the “travail” (weariness) that had befallen them in Egypt, their own kinsman are not sympathetic towards them.
 - a. Esau (Edom) has an ancient and unnatural hatred toward Israel.

“Because you have had an ancient hatred (toward your brother Jacob)...” - Ezekiel 35:5

“Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; His anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever.” – Amos 1:11

4. Verse 16: “We cried out to the LORD and he heard our voice.”
 - a. This fact offers proof that God wished Israel to enter Canaan.
 - b. Consequently, Esau should not bar their way to the land.
5. Rabbinical sources expound upon this: the voice of Jacob and sword of Esau are never in a coexistent state.
 - a. When one is ascending the other is descending.
 - b. When Israel had descended into bondage, Edom was secure in Seir.
 - c. God had heard voice of Jacob and was ascending, Esau should sheath his sword.
6. Verse 18: However, the king of Edom related he would not sheath his sword.
 - a. “You will not pass lest I come against you with the sword.”
 - b. Verse 20-21: Edom comes out with many people to turn Israel away.
 - c. This enmity between the two continues to this day.

CHAPTER 20: AARON’S DEATH

1. Verse 22: The people arrived at Mount Hor (Heb. הַר הָהָר *hor ha'har*).
 - a. Literally “Hor the mountain” or “mountain of the mountain.”
 - b. By the border of Edom.
2. Verse 24: “Aaron shall be gathered unto his people” i.e. will die.
 - a. Tradition states this occurred on 1 Av in the 40th year of the wanderings.
 - b. He was 123 years old.
 - c. He would be succeeded by his son Elazar.
3. Was not permitted to enter the land because of the sin of Meribah.
 - a. Not because of the Golden Calf but because they rebelled against Him at Meribah.
 - b. They did not sanctify the Name in sight of the people.
4. Verse 26-28: Aaron was taken to the mountain and “stripped of his (priestly) garments.”

- a. They were placed upon Elazar – transferring the office to his son.
- b. Aaron died in that place.
- c. The people mourned for him 30 days.

CHAPTER 21: ISRAEL’S LACK OF TRUST

1. The people continue the journey after mourning for Aaron.
2. A Canaanite king of Arad attacked Israel and took captives.
 - a. Arad is situated 17 miles south of Hebron – ruins are there to this day.
 - b. That Arad was in the south (Heb. נֶגֶב *negev*) tells us where Israel was.
 - c. They were following the same route the spies had taken (*atharim* – “spies.”)
 - d. He was a Canaanite although he was living in the regions associated with Amalek.
3. Midrash suggests these were Amalekites who attacked but who spoke Canaanite language.
 - a. This was to confuse Israel who wouldn’t truly know who attacked them.
 - b. Only reason I raise this is because of use of another identity to attack Israel.
 - c. Adversary today uses another “identity” to conceal the true enemy.
 - d. Keep in mind this was a rabbinic “opinion.”
4. Israel prayed for God to intervene promising to destroy – literally to “devote” to destruction.
 - a. The root word is חָרַם *charam* – something “devoted” for a distinct purpose.
5. Verse 3: God answered their prayer and they destroyed them and their cities.
6. Some commentators believe this incident occurred many years before.
 - a. If they just compassed the land of Edom, they are not that close to Arad in the Negev.
 - b. Some believe this precipitated the expedition of the spies thus “*atharim*” (verse 1).
7. After the spies’ evil report the people were sentenced to wander the desert.
 - a. They opted go and fight but were routed and retreated the site of their prior victory.
 - b. That is recorded in Numbers 14:41-45.

“Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.” – Numbers 14:45

8. If that is the case, and it merits consideration, then why is it placed here?
 - a. To remind us of the obstacles Israel had to overcome in order to enter the land?
 - b. Threat of war was an impediment from the beginning of their journey.

“Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, ‘Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.’” – Exodus 13:17

9. This narrative comes immediately after Edom has stood in their way.
 - a. Maybe just another reminder of the threats and God’s ability to destroy the obstacles.
10. More credence is lent when we see what happens in verse 4:

“Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.” – Numbers 21:4

11. This caused them to walk through barren desert and difficult terrain.

12. So we read:

“And the people spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.’ ” – Numbers 21:5

13. The “worthless bread” they were referring to was the manna given to them every day.

a. For them to loathe it speaks more than what meets the eye.

14. The manna is their “daily bread” collected one *omer* at a time.

a. Omer is עמר and is from root word עמר *amar* – “to gather, to heap.”

b. It is related to the word אמר *amar* – “speak” – “gather words and speak them.”

c. Meaning the manna was God’s way of “speaking” to them one *omer* at a time.

“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.” – Deuteronomy 8:1-3

15. They loathed that which was to teach them to live by every word from God’s mouth.

a. Was crucial to observe all these things if they were live, multiply and possess the land.

b. Furthermore, we understand that his bread was representing Messiah – He is the Word.

16. Their complaints were their undoing.

“Nor let us tempt Messiah, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” – 1 Corinthians 10:9-10

17. Their complaints resulted in being destroyed by the destroyer.

a. They were protected from him at Passover because they trusted in blood of lamb.

b. They didn’t trust Him in the desert – this was source of their complaints.

18. They tempted Messiah – how? By saying, “We loathe this detestable bread”?

a. As if to say, this is not enough to sustain us through this desert crossing.

b. Synonymous with saying, the Messiah – the Word of God – is not enough.

c. Tempting Him in saying, we reject that your Word can sustain us.

19. As a result they were destroyed by serpents (1 Cor. 10:9).

CHAPTER 21: BRAZEN SERPENT

1. Verse 6: “And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and bit them.”

a. The venom made the victims feel as if they were burning.

b. Rabbis contend that serpent’s curse did not allow him to taste food.

c. His victims here were bitten because they disdained the taste of the manna.

2. The Hebrew phrase is הנחשים השרפים *ha'n'chashimha's'rafim*.
 - a. Literally, “the serpents, the fiery ones.”
 - b. Which is interesting considering the Serpent of Gen. 3 was the Adversary.
 - c. Seraphim are angelic creatures as well.
3. The Serpent in Genesis caused God’s people to sin by his “speaking” (re: amar/omer).
 - a. These serpents injected the people with the alternative to God’s wishes for them.
 - b. They had refused to hear what God was saying i.e. the manna.
4. Verse 7: The people acknowledge their sins – **speaking** against God - and appeal for mercy.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ ” – Numbers 21:8

5. The word translated as “fiery serpent” is שרף *saraph*.
 - a. *Nachash* “serpent” is not in the text; it is understood.
6. Place is word “to appoint” (re: שם *shem*); “it” is the word אָתּוֹ *oto* which is the word “him.”
 - a. i.e. “Appoint him (the seraph) upon a pole.
 - b. The word “pole” is נֵס *nes* – a banner.
7. Verse 8: “Everyone that is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”
 - a. The people are to look upon this strange sign that God has chosen for their deliverance.

“Make a seraph and appoint him as banner. Everyone who is bitten by the serpent and doomed to die, when he sees Him, shall live.

“And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner (נֵס *nes*) to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.”
 – Isaiah 11:10

8. This points us to the Mashiach, Y’shua.
 - a. נחש *nachash* (358) compared to משיח *Mashiach* (358).

“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” – John 3:13-14

9. The serpent had beguiled the woman and led to the first Adam’s sin.
 - a. The second Adam fooled the Serpent and gave life to dying men.
 - b. He “appeared” as one the serpent had infected with sin (flesh) even though He wasn’t.

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” – 2 Corinthians 5:21

10. An interesting comment on this from rabbinical commentary:

“Does a serpent cause death or life? Rather, when they looked upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in heaven they were healed, but if not, they died.”

11. Verse 9: “And Moses made a serpent of brass and set it upon a pole” – literally, “the banner.”
 - a. It does not say that God told Moses to make the serpent of brass but he did.
 - b. The term in Hebrew is נחש נחשת *nachashn'choset*; “brass” contains word “serpent.”
 - c. The source of destruction was the source of healing; one who knew no sin became sin.
12. Everyone who looked to the serpent of brass was healed.
 - a. Word translated as “looked” is הביט *hi'beit* from root נבט *nabat*.
 - b. Word means more than “to look.” Better: “to perceive, look intently, consider.”
 - c. Not everyone who looks upon the “picture” is saved.
 - d. We must perceive what it means; gaze not with the eyes but with the heart.
13. Another rabbinic commentary makes this point.

“The brazen serpent was a token of salvation to put them in remembrance of the commandments of Thy Law, for he that turned toward it was not saved because of that which was beheld but because of thee, the Savior of all.”

14. Footnote: The serpent eventually became an object of veneration and idolatrous worship by the Israelites. It was destroyed by King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4).
 - a. They called it *nachushtan* - נחשתן.

CHAPTER 21: THE HALTING PLACES

1. The children of Israel continue their journey from place to place.
2. Verse 14: “the book of the Wars of the LORD.”
 - a. No other mention of this book in all of Scripture.
3. Ibn Ezra says of this book:

“It was an independent book in which were written the records of the wars waged by God on behalf of those that fear Him. Many books have been lost and are no longer extant among us; e.g. the Words of Nathan and Iddo, and the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.”

4. Verse 16: And from there to Be'er (literally “the well.”)
 - a. Where they sang a song celebrating the water in the desert.
 - b. One translation describes it as a “gift from the wilderness.”
 - c. It was excavated by the nobles i.e. Moses and Aaron.
 - d. It was accomplished by the Lawgiver with “their staffs.”
5. Twice they had received water of the Rock in the wilderness.
 - a. The Rock was the Messiah.

“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation. Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” – Isaiah 12:2-3

6. The “well” was a gift where there was no hope. Y’shua is the gift where there was no hope.
 - a. As noted before, Rabbis teach this well followed them wherever they went.
 - b. Paul says the Rock followed them (1 Cor. 10)
 - c. One commentator contends this “well/rock” is metaphor for Torah – also Y’shua.

7. Verse 20: They came to Pisgah – a mountain range (also called Abarim in Deut. 32:49).
 - a. This contains Mount Nebo where Moses died.

CHAPTER 21: SIHON AND OG

1. Though he wanted nothing more than to pass through their land, Moses does war with the Amorite kings.
 - a. They were the ones to initiate battle.
2. Verse 23: Sihon was the first to deny them passage.
 - a. Israel destroyed him and possessed his land.
3. Verse 25: “Israel took all these cities and dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites.”
 - a. At this point they begin to transition from a nomadic lifestyle to living in communities.
4. Verse 26-27: Mentions Heshbon as city of Sihon and from there he conquered Moabite lands.
 - a. This included Heshbon.
 - b. The poets of verse 27 are said to be Balaam and Be’or (his father).
 - c. Moab had resisted Sihon until he hired Balaam to curse Moab – a prelude?
5. Verse 32: “Moses sent to spy out Jazer and they conquered the towns thereof.”
 - a. Notice there was no returning a report to the people.
 - b. The spies apparently took these cities without waiting for everyone else.
 - c. There was no evil report to bring to the people – Moses sent them quietly.
 - d. Apparently they reported only to him.
6. Verse 33: “They ... went up by the way of Bashan and Og ... went out against them.”
 - a. Og was the king of Bashan (Golan) – from Gilead to Mount Hermon.
 - b. He was the last of the רפאים *repha'im* – a strain of giants.
 - c. His very appearance inspired terror.
7. In spite of this, the LORD tells Moses “Do not fear him for I have delivered him to you.”
 - a. And they did as well as possessing his land.
8. Chapter 22:1 – “Israel journeyed and pitched in the plains of Moab beyond Jordan at Jericho.”