

Parasha Chukat

Numbers 19:1-22:1

Judges 11:1-33

John 3:10-21

The Torah Portion at a Glance



Moses is taught the laws of the Red Heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body.

After 40 years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies and the people thirst for water. YHWH tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by YHWH that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land. Aaron dies at Har Hahar and is succeeded in the High Priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people "speak against YHWH and Moses"; YHWH tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert.

Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel's passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

The Messiah in the Torah Portion

"Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come. You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him....Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight....And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer....Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin." (excerpts from Numbers 19:2-9)

One mystery in this Torah portion is the selection about the "parah adumah" or "red heifer." This holy cow was commanded to be used as a special offering. The parah adumah had the power to purify the uncleanness of death. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke," Numbers 19:2. The Messiah Y'shua was a fulfillment of YHWH's parah adumah as He was without spot of sin.

The book of Hebrews explains how the parah adumah pictured the Moshiach. The red cow was slain outside the gate like Y'shua, Hebrews 13:12. The entire heifer was to be consumed just as Y'shua gave his entire life for the Father's Kingdom. The ashes of the red cow were to be collected and stored in a clean place. The body of Y'shua was placed in a perfectly new tomb. Those same ashes were to be stored outside the city, just as the body of Y'shua lay in a tomb outside the city.

When the heifer was sacrificed there was hyssop, cedar and scarlet added. Y'shua was clothed in a scarlet robe and vinegar was given to him as he was crucified. The heifer was red – the color of blood that Y'shua shed for all mankind. The third day and the seventh day were days of purification after the parah adumah water was used. Y'shua rose on the third day and will return at the completion of the seventh day.

The sacrificial cow's ashes cleansed and purified all that touched it. "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Y'shua, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of YHWH, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water," Hebrews 19:22.

In Hebrews 9:13-14 it says: "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 Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered Himself without spot to YHWH, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living YHWH?"

Applying the Portion to Life Today

Mark Twain once said, "Don't complain and talk about all your problems – 80 percent of people don't care; the other 20 percent will think you deserve them."

There is a great deal of truth in Twain's words. Unfortunately Twain wasn't around to share this timeless wisdom with Beit Yisra'el during their wilderness wanderings. For forty years complaining and murmuring seemed to be an area that Yisra'el excelled in. They were always fussing about something. In fact, the majority of the book of Bamidbar (Numbers) is devoted to the reporting of the many rebellions of Yisra'el and their consequences. Not perfect conditions and not perfect people led to complaining and rebellion.

Here's a short list of just a few of the times Yisra'el complained and got into trouble:

- In Chapter 11 the Yisraelites complain about their "misfortunes;" YHWH sends fire and consumes some outlying parts of the camp. No deaths occurred yet the Yisraelites continued to fuss about eating manna, and long for meat. Moshe asks for help from YHWH to deal with the people and is given 70 elders; YHWH then provides quail but many overeat and die of a plague.
- Miryam and Aharon speak against Moshe in Chapter 12. YHWH tells them that he speaks to Moshe directly, not in dreams as he does to prophets; Elohim then strikes Miryam with a leprosy-like disease.
- After accepting the report from 10 of the 12 spies that went into Canaan that the people of that land cannot be defeated, the unfaithful Yisraelites are sentenced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years; the 10 spies die in a plague. Then the Hebrews try to enter the land without YHWH's blessing, and they are soundly defeated by the Canaanites and Amalekites in Chapter 14.

- The rebellions of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On, and 250 chosen men bring a terrible earthquake that swallows them up with their families in Chapter 16.
- Yisrael continues to complain against Moshe and a plague is sent by Elohim, which kills over 14,000 people. Moshe graciously intercedes and YHWH stops the plague. To stop the continuous rebellions by Yisrael and to prove through whom Elohim speaks, a rod is taken from each of the 12 tribes and placed in the tent of meeting; Aharon's is the only rod that buds (chapter 17).
- Again in chapter 21, complaints by the Yisraelites are made against Moshe and Aharon. This time about a water shortage; Moshe strikes the rock twice and water comes forward
- In chapter 25 the Yisraelite will mix with the "daughters of Moab" and be lured into idolatry. As a result of this rebellion over 24,000 are killed by Elohim

Another time of uprising against YHWH and His leadership occurs in the Torah parasha for this week. The reader of "Chukat" quickly understands the power of the tongue. In Chapter 21 verse 5 of Bamidbar the Beit Yisra'el spoke against Moshe's leadership and YHWH's leading. There is no doubt they were discouraged, but they handled their frustration the wrong way.

You see, the Hebrews were irritated because the way was harsh. The food of heaven-supplied manna had become bland and boring. And they were tired. The comforts of Mitzrayim, little as they were, seemed better than living life as a nomad in search of a homeland. They spoke harshly against Moshe AND YHWH when bypassing the land of Edom. The Talmud says, "whoever speaks against the shepherd of Israel, it is as though he spoke against Elohim."

"They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against Elohim and against Moshe, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food," Bamidbar 21:4-5.

The result of this complaining was discipline from YHWH Himself in the form of the removal of His protection. YHWH lifted his protective covering and allowed fiery serpents to plague the people. Many are bitten and die until Moshe prays to YHWH on behalf of the people; a bronze serpent is made and placed on a pole—the people that were bitten look on it and are saved. The people had stepped into the realm of the serpent and now had to face the consequences. You see, when a person gives into murmuring and complaining then that person is stepping out of the realm of the Spirit and into the realm of the flesh. You will be disciplined if you rise up against spiritual leadership. Again, this isn't the first time Yisra'el has rebelled. Before they have faced earthquakes, stomach aches, fire from heaven, and military defeats as their punishment. Now they must see the error of their ways or die.

"The power of life and death is in the tongue," says Mishlei (Proverbs) 18:21. Yisra'el could have spoken blessings to YHWH and supported Moshe's leadership but they did not. No, their words were rebellious, and brought death. This is a prime example on how words can either bring chayim and shalom or bickering and destruction. Just think of how different history would read if Yisra'el supported Moshe, Aharon, and YHWH's leading instead of rebelling against it. How soon would have the nation reached the Promised Land? How many lives would have been spared if they would have just listened and obeyed? Wouldn't life have been better for the nation if they could have just learned from their mistakes?

Sadly, Yisra'el didn't learn from their mistakes, so the nation repeated them. Over and over again the Torah records the people fussing and defying YHWH. And over and over again the nation faces discipline. Just because you can learn from your mistakes doesn't mean you have to make them all yourself. There are many things that can be realized from the errors of others. For just a moment put yourself in Yisra'el's shoes (or sandals).

Step out of your comforts of life in the fast lane of 2004 and imagine you are part of the mixed multitude being led by Moshe to the Promised Land. How easy would it be fuss and moan about manna, divine leadership, and no water? Could you hold your tongue day after day or would you honestly be as guilty as our ancestors for constantly complaining? How often do you complain about life now? It was wrong to argue and complain for Yisra'el then and it is still wrong for Yisra'el today.

Here are a few life lessons to reflect on about complaining. Don't fuss about it – just keep reading!

- Talking about your ills just makes you more ill. Complaining never gets you anywhere but worse off. If all you do is talk about your problems then your problems will seem better. Sometimes it's best to remember that things are never as bad as they seem. Situations could always be worse and life is much better than it's opposite. “
- Complaining grieves the Ruach HaKodesh! When you bicker you enter the realm of the serpent and step out of the realm of the Spirit. Watch out or the snakes will bite you – “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of Elohim, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption,” Ephesians 4:29 & 30.
- When in doubt don't. To be honest, sometimes it is hard to support spiritual leadership that seems to be going in a different direction or different pace than you would like. When in doubt of spiritual leadership don't complain – pray for your leaders and support them. Hear what they have to say and bite your tongue...“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and should not become angry easily,” says the book of Ya'akov.
- It is the little things in life that often lead to murmuring...traffic jams, screaming kids, slow internet, old manna, and little water don't really matter. Before you fuss think about the subject of your mouth. Are you really making a point about your objections or are you just barking about wants, desires, and stuff? “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers,” Galatians 6:9-10.

Lastly - “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of Elohim without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe,” Philippians 2:14-15 – what else needs to be said?

Portion Points to Ponder

1. What does the Hebrew name of this Torah portion mean?
2. Read the Haftarah portion of Judges 11:1-33. How does this relate to this week's Torah portion?
3. Read the Newer Testament sections of John 3:10-21. Why were these passages chosen to correspond to this week's reading? What did you learn from these words?

4. How does this portion speak of Messiah Y'shua?
5. "Take a perfect para aduma (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" mean in this context?
6. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a para aduma?
7. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
8. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the para aduma; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
9. Why was the mitzvah / commandment of the para aduma entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
10. Why does the Torah stress that all of the congregation came to Midbar Tzin / the wilderness of Tzin?
11. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of para aduma?
12. During their journey in the midbar, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
13. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time? What eventually happened because of this sin?
14. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Hebrew People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
15. We are told that the cloud that led the Hebrew People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
16. Why did the entire congregation mourn Aharon's death?
17. What disappeared when Aharon died?
18. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Israelites?
19. For what two reasons did YHWH punish the people with snakes specifically?
20. Why did the Israelite People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter Eretz Canaan?
21. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
22. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Hebrew People from entering into their Land?
23. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
24. Who killed Og?
25. The Parsha title "Chukat" comes from a word for a Divine ordinance that has no "rational" explanation. (As opposed to Eidot/Testimonies and Mishpatim/Laws, that can be sensibly understood.) Within the category of Chukim (plural) are two levels; 1) those decrees that could in principle be understood by human intelligence, but details of which are beyond comprehension, and 2) those which are entirely beyond the scope of human understanding. Why is the law of the Red Heifer a chuk?
26. How does James 2:10 speak of the Torah being divided into commandments that can be understood and commandments that can not?
27. How would speaking to the rock teach the Jewish people to use their spiritual abilities to accomplish physical goals? What was the difference between striking and speaking to the rock, in terms of involvement at the physical level versus at the level of the soul? How would the latter be a greater miracle than the former?
28. How would the miracle of speaking to the rock have helped bring the people to a higher level of spirituality/holiness? How is this concept related to that of "sanctifying the Name of YHWH?" How might this be compared to us learning to speak to "THE ROCK?" How does "spiritual stagnation" in fact cause us to move "backward" spiritually? (See the book of Hebrews where this idea is alluded to several times.)
29. The Torah shows that when Miriam died, the well of water dried up. Miriam was what is known as a Tzaddik, "a righteous person" through whom others are blessed. Why might it benefit us to seek out such Tzaddikim and associate with them? Compare this to last week's Parsha, where those of the tribe of Reuben associated themselves with Korach.

30. The laws of the red heifer were never clearly understood, but such a law tested the obedience of the Israelites. Are there rules and laws which you must follow in your life (at home, at work or at school; as an American or as a Hebrew that don't seem to make sense? What are they? Discuss your family rules and the reasons that they are rules for your family. Do you think any of the rules your family has are to test the obedience of the children? Why or why not?
31. The ritual of the Red Heifer, of course, fell into disuse after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. What can we learn from this commandment today? How does the Red Heifer apply to life in this time?
32. The focus of the incident at the waters of Meribah is the divine decree that neither Moses nor Aaron shall live to enter the Promised Land. Striking a rock rather than speaking to it does not seem a justifiable reason for Moses to be excluded from the land. Yet, four times the Torah identifies this incident as the cause of Moses and Aaron's exclusion from the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12, 20:24, 27:14, and Deuteronomy 32:51). Was such a punishment against Moses fair?
33. Did Moses and Aaron sin by forgetting that they were to serve as role models for the Israelites when they exploded in anger at Meribah, and misled the people into believing that uncontrolled anger is allowed in a leader?
34. Does leadership demand a higher degree of righteousness and self-control than is required from the rest of society? What do you do when you get very angry? Can you think of some constructive ways to let people know what made/makes you angry?
35. How does the red heifer point to Yeshua?
36. Numbers 20:2–3 says, “There was no water ... the people chided with Moses.” Do you suffer lack in your life? Scripture says that Yeshua will supply all of our needs (Phil 4:19). Do you get angry with YHVH and murmur against him for your lot in life and for the bad things that happen to you? Or do you give thanks to him for all that happens (1□Thess 5:18) knowing that all things work to good for the benefit of our being conformed into the image of Yeshua (Rom 8:28–29)? If we keep fighting or resisting our trials in the wilderness instead of learning from them and overcoming them, then how will we be able to enter the Promised Land? It is about faith in the promises of YHVH. Do we truly believe his Word when he says he will supply all of our needs?
37. In Numbers 21:6 YHWH sent fiery serpents. YHVH judged Israel for murmuring by sending fiery serpents among them. How often do we lash out with our tongues to kill, steal and destroy, to sow discord among brethren (which YHWH hates and calls an abomination, Prov 6:16–19)?
38. In Numbers 21:7 the Torah says “We have sinned, for we have spoken against YHWH”. Why were the people punished?
39. Numbers 21:8–9 says that “Moses made a serpent of brass.” How is the serpent on the bronze pole is another prophetic picture of the redemptive work of Yeshua. What are the parallels? Why is the pole bronze? Why is it a snake and how does that picture Yeshua? Why a pole? (See John 3:14 and 12:32.)

The Open Bible is a teaching series written by Daniel Rendelman of Emet Ministries. Find more teachings, audio messages, videos, and music at www.emetministries.com.

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