

PARASHAT CHUKAT

Numbers 19:1–22:1

Parashat Chukat begins by describing the ritual slaughter and sacrifice of the *parah adumah*, or “red cow,” by Eleazar the priest, and the ritual cleansing for those who touch a corpse. Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, dies at Kadesh. Again the people complain that they have no water to drink. God tells Moses to take his rod and order a rock to bring forth water. Angry at the complaining people, whom he calls “rebels,” Moses strikes the rock with his rod. Water pours out. The people drink and water their animals. God informs Moses that because of his anger he will not be allowed to lead his people into the Land of Israel. Moses asks the king of Edom for permission to pass through his land. The king refuses, and the Israelites take another route. When they reach Hor, Aaron dies, and his priestly authority is passed on to his son, Eleazar. The people mourn Aaron for thirty days. Afterwards they are attacked by the Canaanites, whom they conquer with God’s help. However, the people continue to complain to Moses: “Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness?” God sends snakes among the people to bite them for their disloyalty. Moses begs forgiveness for them when they admit their wrongdoing. God tells Moses to place a *seraph* figure—a snake made of copper—on his staff. When the people see it, they will be healed. The Israelites are later attacked by the Amorites and the people of Bashan and Og. In each battle the Israelites emerge victorious, conquering towns and acquiring large territories.
