

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

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19

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ²This is the ritual law that the LORD has commanded:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן
 לֵאמֹר: ²זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה
 יְהוָה לֵאמֹר:

The Generation of the Exodus: The March to Transjordan (continued)

PURIFICATION FROM CONTAMINATION BY A CORPSE (19:1–22)

Contamination that results from contact with a corpse is mentioned elsewhere in the Torah (see, e.g., Lev. 21:1–4; Num. 6:6–13). Here, the Torah prescribes the method of purification. In this rite, the blood of an all-brown (“red”) cow is not of-

fered on the altar; it is burned together with the cow’s body, so that the ashes may be used as an ongoing instrument of purification. As in all purification offerings, the man who burns the cow becomes impure himself.

In the course of this *parashah*, Miriam dies, Aaron dies, and Moses is sentenced to die without reaching the Promised Land. A transition of generations is taking place. The narrative’s center of gravity is moving farther from Sinai and closer to the challenge of conquering the Promised Land. Soon there will be no Israelites left who actually stood at Sinai, only Israelites who have heard about it from parents and grandparents.

CHAPTER 19

Before continuing with the narrative, the Torah offers us the strange ritual of the brown (“red”) cow. It is the classic example of a law that defies rational explanation. Indeed, the general tenor of the commentaries asks us to accept this law without understanding it, as a sign of love for and trust in God. The commentators hold that it would be almost unseemly to search for a rational explanation, implying that God’s word would be acceptable only if it fit our canons of reasoning. Human failure to understand a truth does not make it any less true. The Midrash pictures King Solomon, the wisest man in the Bible, saying, “I have labored to understand the word of God and have understood it all, except for the ritual of the brown cow” (Num. R. 19:3). “These laws are decrees from God and we have no right to question them” (Num. R. 19:8). “It is more praiseworthy to do something solely because God commands it than because our own logic or sense of morality leads us to the same conclusion” (*Sifra K’doshim*). The Tosafot compare this commandment to a lover’s kiss which cannot be explained but can only be experienced (BT Av. Zar. 35a).

Yet there have been persistent efforts to uncover the lessons taught to us by this ritual. Although the Torah describes the ritual as purifying a person of contamination from contact with a dead body and nothing else, the Midrash widens the scope to include moral contamination, especially idolatry, viewing this special cow as the antidote for the sin of the Golden Calf. “Let the mother come and repair the damage the offspring has caused” (Num. R. 19:8). Ramban, noting that the passage comes immediately after the completion of the tabernacle and the challenge to Aaron’s priesthood, understands it as a way of preventing ritually unfit people from violating the sanctity of the tabernacle. Israel of Ruzhin points out that this cow purifies the impure but renders the pure impure; God similarly purifies those who approach the sanctuary in a spirit of humility with knowledge of their own inadequacies, but condemns those who come in a spirit of arrogance and a claim to perfection. A modern commentator suggests that the ritual’s purpose is psychological. To heal a person burdened by a sense of wrongdoing, who feels the purity of his or her soul has been compromised, we take an animal completely without blemish and sacrifice it, as if to imply that perfection does not belong in this world. Perfect creatures belong in heaven; this world is given to the inevitably flawed and compromised.

Because this rite is inoperative today, so that there is no way to purify the ritually contaminated, some halakhic authorities consider all Jews ritually unfit to enter the Temple Mount lest they inadvertently tread on the site where the holiest precincts of the temple once stood in Jerusalem.

Instruct the Israelite people to bring you a red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid. ³You shall give it to Eleazar the priest. It shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. ⁴Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting. ⁵The cow shall be burned in his sight—its hide, flesh, and blood shall be burned, its dung included—⁶and the priest shall take cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson stuff, and throw them into the fire consuming the cow. ⁷The priest shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water; after that the priest may reenter the camp, but he shall be impure until evening. ⁸He who performed the burning shall also wash his garments in water, bathe his body in water, and be impure until evening. ⁹A man who is pure shall gather up the ashes of the cow and deposit them outside the camp in a pure place, to be kept for water of lustration for the Israelite community. It is for purification. ¹⁰He who gathers up the ashes of

דָּבַר | אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֵיךָ פָּרָה
אֲדָמָה תְּמִימָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין-בָּהּ מוֹם אֲשֶׁר
לֹא-עָלָה עָלֶיהָ עַל: ³ וַנִּתַּתָּם אֵתָהּ אֶל-
אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְהוֹצִיא אֵתָהּ אֶל-מַחוּץ
לַמַּחֲנֶה וְשָׁחַט אֵתָהּ לְפָנָיו: ⁴ וְלָקַח
אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן מִדְּמָהּ בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְהִזָּה אֶל-
נֹכַח פְּנֵי אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד מִדְּמָהּ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים:
⁵ וְשָׂרַף אֶת-הַפָּרָה לְעֵינָיו אֶת-עֹרָהּ וְאֶת-
בְּשָׂרָהּ וְאֶת-דָּמָהּ עַל-פְּרִשָׁה יִשְׂרָף:
⁶ וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן עֵץ אָרְזוֹ וְאֶזְוִב וְשִׁנֵּי תוֹלַעַת
וְהִשְׁלִיךְ אֶל-תוֹךְ שַׂרְפַּת הַפָּרָה: ⁷ וְכִבֵּס
בְּגָדָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְרַחֵץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְאַחֵר
יָבוֹא אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה וְטָמֵא הַכֹּהֵן עַד-
הָעֶרֶב: ⁸ וְהִשְׂרַף אֵתָהּ יַכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו בַּמַּיִם
וְרַחֵץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב:
⁹ וְאָסַף | אִישׁ טָהוֹר אֵת אֶפְרַת הַפָּרָה
וְהִנִּיחַ מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה בְּמָקוֹם טָהוֹר
וְהִיתָה לְעֵדוּת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ לְמִי
נִדָּה חֲטָאת הוּא: ¹⁰ וְכִבֵּס הָאֵטָף אֶת-

THE BROWN ("RED") COW (vv. 1–13)

2. red Hebrew: *adom*, which here probably means "brown"—for which there is no word in the Bible. The idea is to increase, symbolically, the amount of blood in the ashes.

red . . . without blemish Better: "unblemished brown." A cow completely uniform in color, without specks of white or black or without even two black or white hairs, is extremely rare.

no yoke has been laid It must not have been used for profane purposes.

3. in his presence The cow will also be burned in the presence of Eleazar, indicating that it is imperative for the officiating priest to supervise the entire ritual.

4. sprinkle it seven times This act consecrates the cow as a purification offering.

6. priest Any priest, not just Eleazar.

hyssop, and crimson stuff Hyssop, an aromatic plant, is widespread in the land of Israel. Crimson yarn refers to the dye extracted from a "crimson worm," used in the weaving of the sa-

cred garments of the high priest and the inner curtains of the tabernacle.

7. wash his garments and bathe his body If he bathed first, his unwashed garments would recontaminate him.

until evening Whoever handles a burnt *hattat* offering may enter the camp as soon as he has laundered his clothing and bathed (see Lev. 16:26,28), provided he does not partake of sacred food until the evening.

8. He who performed the burning It is also presumed that he who gathers up the ashes remains outside the camp until after he has laundered and bathed, precisely as the contaminated priest has done.

9. A man Not necessarily a priest.

to be kept The ashes of the brown ("red") cow must be guarded scrupulously lest they become contaminated.

It is for purification These ashes mixed with water will be sprinkled on corpse-contaminated individuals to remove the impurity.

10. wash his clothes It is understood that he will also bathe his body.

the cow shall also wash his clothes and be impure until evening.

This shall be a permanent law for the Israelites and for the strangers who reside among you.

¹¹He who touches the corpse of any human being shall be impure for seven days. ¹²He shall purify himself with [the ashes] on the third day and on the seventh day, and then be pure; if he fails to purify himself on the third and seventh days, he shall not be pure. ¹³Whoever touches a corpse, the body of a person who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the LORD's Tabernacle; that person shall be cut off from Israel. Since the water of lustration was not dashed on him, he remains impure; his impurity is still upon him.

¹⁴This is the ritual: When a person dies in a tent, whoever enters the tent and whoever is in the tent shall be impure seven days; ¹⁵and every open vessel, with no lid fastened down, shall be impure. ¹⁶And in the open, anyone who touches a person who was killed or who died naturally, or human bone, or a grave, shall be impure seven days. ¹⁷Some of the ashes from the fire of purification shall be taken for the im-

אֶפְרַיִם הַפָּרָה אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְטָמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב
וְהִיטָה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם
לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם:

¹¹ הַנִּגְעַת בְּמַת לְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם וְטָמָא
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: ¹² הוּא יִתְחַטֵּא־בּוֹ בְּיוֹם
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִטְהַר וְאִם־לֹא
יִתְחַטֵּא בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
לֹא יִטְהַר: ¹³ כָּל־הַנִּגְעַת בְּמַת בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם
אֲשֶׁר־יָמוּת וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא אֶת־מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה
טָמָא וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל כִּי
מִי נָדָה לֹא־זָרַק עָלָיו טָמָא יְהִיָּה עוֹד
טָמְאָתוֹ בּוֹ:

¹⁴ זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אָדָם כִּי־יָמוּת בְּאֹהֶל
כָּל־הַבָּא אֶל־הָאֹהֶל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹהֶל
יִטָּמָא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: ¹⁵ וְכָל כְּלִי פְתוּיָח
אֲשֶׁר אֵין־צְמִיד פְּתִיל עָלָיו טָמָא הוּא:
¹⁶ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יָגַע עַל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה בְּחָלָל־
חָרֵב אֹו בְּמַת אֹו־בְעֵצִים אָדָם אֹו בְּקִבֹר
יִטָּמָא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: ¹⁷ וְלִקְחוּ לְטָמָא

strangers All those who dwell in the Holy Land, Israelites and non-Israelites alike, must purify themselves of corpse contamination lest they defile the sanctuary by bearing their impurity within the community.

11. seven days Similarly, in ancient Babylonia, one who came into contact with dust from a place of mourning was required to offer sacrifices to the god Shamash, to bathe, change clothing, and remain inside the house for seven days.

13. defiles the LORD's Tabernacle Severe impurity is dynamic and can attack the sanctuary through the air. Corpse-contaminated individuals who prolong their impurity have defiled the sanctuary from afar, even without entering it.

shall be cut off If the neglect was deliberate

(see 15:30–31). (If the neglect was accidental, a purification offering is brought.)

PURIFICATION BY SPRINKLING (vv. 14–22)

14. enters the tent The impurity emitted by the body is trapped by the roof, so to speak, and cannot rise. Hence, every person and object under the roof is contaminated.

15. every open vessel A tightly closed vessel made entirely of earthenware, however, will not admit the “vapors” of impurity given off by the corpse; its contents remain pure.

fastened down The lid is attached by cords passing through holes in it and through the handles of the vessel. Such a lid would keep the vessel tightly closed and preserve it from defilement.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

19:14. When a person dies Once the Temple was destroyed, we could not purify ourselves from this type of ritual impurity. Now all but *kohanim* may attend funerals (see Lev. 21:2). We rinse our hands upon leaving the cemetery or upon entering a house of mourning after the funeral, in symbolic recollection of this law.

pure person, and fresh water shall be added to them in a vessel. ¹⁸A person who is pure shall take hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle on the tent and on all the vessels and people who were there, or on him who touched the bones or the person who was killed or died naturally or the grave. ¹⁹The pure person shall sprinkle it upon the impure person on the third day and on the seventh day, thus purifying him by the seventh day. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe in water, and at nightfall he shall be pure. ²⁰If anyone who has become impure fails to purify himself, that person shall be cut off from the congregation, for he has defiled the LORD's sanctuary. The water of lustration was not dashed on him: he is impure.

²¹That shall be for them a law for all time. Further, he who sprinkled the water of lustration shall wash his clothes; and whoever touches the water of lustration shall be impure until evening. ²²Whatever that impure person touches shall be impure; and the person who touches him shall be impure until evening.

20 The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon, and

shall be impure Open earthenware vessels are impure forever and must be broken.

18. A person who is pure This obvious condition is made explicit to bar those who had already handled the ashes and were thereby contaminated.

מֵעֵפֶר שְׂרִפַּת הַחֲטָאִת וְנָתַן עָלָיו מִיִּם שְׁנֵי חַיִּים אֶל-כֹּלֵי: ¹⁸ וְלָקַח אֶזּוֹב וְטָבַל בְּמֵיִם אִישׁ טָהוֹר וְהִזָּה עַל-הָאֹהֶל וְעַל-כָּל-הַכֵּלִים וְעַל-הַנִּפְשׁוֹת אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ-שָׁם וְעַל-הַנֶּגַע בְּעַצֶּם אֹו בְּחָלָל אֹו בְּמֵת אֹו בְּקִבֶּר: ¹⁹ וְהִזָּה הַטָּהוֹר עַל-הַטָּמֵא בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְחָטְאוּ בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרָחַץ בְּמֵיִם וְטָהַר בְּעֶרְב: ²⁰ וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִטְמָא וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִתּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל כִּי אֶת-מִקְדָּשׁ יְהוָה טָמָא מִי נִדָּה לֹא-זֹרֵק עָלָיו טָמָא הוּא:

²¹ וְהִיְתָה לָהֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם וּמִזָּה מִי-הַנִּדָּה יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְהַנֶּגַע בְּמֵי הַנִּדָּה יִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ²² וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-יִגְעֹבוּ הַטָּמֵא יִטְמָא וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ הַנִּגְעָת הַטָּמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: פ

כ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל-הָעֵדָה מִדְּבַר-

on all the vessels Afterward these must undergo washing, as people must.

19. Full purification comes only after laundering and bathing.

21. See Comment to 19:10.

22. Whatever That is, anything or anyone.

FROM KADESH TO THE STEPPES OF MOAB (20:1–22:1)

THE SIN OF MOSES AND AARON (20:1–13)

After Miriam's death, the people complain about the lack of water. Moses and Aaron are com-

manded to bring forth water from the rock. They produce the water but in so doing commit a sin akin to heresy and are condemned by God to die in the wilderness.

CHAPTER 20

1. The Talmud connects Miriam's death to the preceding passage. "Just as the ashes of the

brown cow atone for sin, the death of a righteous person does the same" (BT MK 28a). In the wake of a good person's death, we are moved to re-examine our own lives.

the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there.

²The community was without water, and they joined against Moses and Aaron. ³The people quarreled with Moses, saying, “If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of the LORD! ⁴Why have you brought the LORD’s congregation into this wilderness for us and our beasts to die there? ⁵Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water to drink!”

⁶Moses and Aaron came away from the congregation to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and fell on their faces. The Presence of the LORD appeared to them, ⁷and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸“You and your brother Aaron take the rod and assemble the community, and before their very eyes order the rock to yield its

צֶן בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָם בְּקֶדֶשׁ וַתָּמָת שָׁם מֵרִימֹם וַתִּקָּבֵר שָׁם:

² וְלֹא-הָיָה מַיִם לְעֵדָה וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן: ³ וַיִּרְבּוּ הָעָם עִם-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר וְלוֹ גִּוְעָנוּ בְּגֹעַ אַחֲיֵינוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ⁴ וְלָמָּה הֵבֵאתֶם אֶת-קְהַל יְהוָה אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לָמוֹת שָׁם אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעֵירָנוּ: ⁵ וְלָמָּה הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהֵבִיא אֹתָנוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַרְעֵ הַזֶּה לֹא מְקוֹם זֵרַע וַתֵּאָנֶה וּגְפָן וְרִמּוֹן וַיְמִים אֵין לְשָׁתוֹת:

⁶ וַיָּבֹאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מִפְּנֵי קְהַל אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד-יְהוָה אֲלֵיהֶם: ⁷ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ⁸ קַח אֶת-הַמַּטֵּה וְהַקְהֵל אֶת-הָעֵדָה אֹתָהּ וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְדַבְּרֶתֶם

שלישי
[שני]

THE DEATH OF MIRIAM (v. 1)

1. The generation of the Exodus has died out and this is the 40th year. According to 13:26, however, the Israelites had already arrived at Kadesh at the start of their sojourn in the wilderness. Some commentators suggest that after having left Kadesh they returned to it in the 40th year. Most likely, these are two variant traditions.

Miriam died there On the 10th day of the first month, according to an ancient tradition.

3. when our brothers perished During the Korahite rebellion (16:35, 17:14). Although the

people identify with the Korahite rebels, God does not punish them because their complaint is legitimate: They are dying of thirst.

6. came away from That is, in flight.
fell on their faces Out of fear.

The Presence That is, the fire-encased cloud.

8. rod Of Moses, which had been employed in the performance of God’s miracles in the wilderness (see Exod. 14:16, 17:1–7,9).

to yield its water Because of the will of God, not the rod of Moses.

2. The community was without water A legend tells of a marvelous well that sprang up wherever the Israelites camped, as a tribute to Miriam’s piety. As she waited by the waters of the Nile to see the fate of her baby brother, as she celebrated God’s power at the Sea, so was she blessed with water, a substance more valuable in the desert than gold. When she died, the well vanished.

4. When Israel was leaving Egypt, triumphant and optimistic, they saw themselves as “the LORD’s congregation.” In the midst of the wilderness, thirsty and discouraged, they seem to be saying “We who used to think of ourselves as the LORD’s congregation can now only think in terms of being thirsty, along with

our cattle.” Similarly, in verse 8, God promises to send water for “the congregation and their beasts.” This has been understood to mean that the people, desperate with thirst, were responding at virtually an animal level, no different than their cattle (*Meshekh Hokhmah*).

6–12. When Moses strikes the rock to draw water instead of speaking to it as God commanded, he is condemned to die in the wilderness. In this puzzling incident, the punishment seems grossly disproportionate to the offense. Why should Moses, who has served God so loyally for so many years through so many trying times, be so harshly punished for what seems like a minor infraction? The classic commentators labor to find in the text some justifica-

water. Thus you shall produce water for them from the rock and provide drink for the congregation and their beasts.”

⁹Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as He had commanded him. ¹⁰Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock; and he said to them, “Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?” ¹¹And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Out came copious water, and the community and their beasts drank.

¹²But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm

אֶל־הַסֵּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם וְנָתַן מִיַּמּוֹ וְהוֹצֵאתָ
לָהֶם מַיִם מִן־הַסֵּלַע וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת־הָעֵדָה
וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם:

⁹וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמַּטֵּה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ: ¹⁰וַיִּקְהֵלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן
אֶת־הַקְּהָל אֶל־פְּנֵי הַסֵּלַע וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם
שָׁמְעוּ־נָא הַמַּרְיִים הַמִּן־הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצֵיא
לָכֶם מַיִם: ¹¹וַיִּרָם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיַּךְ
אֶת־הַסֵּלַע בַּמַּטֵּהוּ פַּעַמַיִם וַיֵּצְאוּ מִמֶּיֶם
רְבִיִּים וַתִּשְׁתֶּה הָעֵדָה וּבְעִירָם: ס
¹²וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַל־אַהֲרֹן יַעַן

9. from before the LORD That is, from the tabernacle.

as He had commanded him This statement would have been expected before or after the account of the fulfillment of the command, not in the middle. Its “misplacement” is deliberate, however. Up to this point Moses executes God’s command; thereafter, he deviates from it.

11. twice This indicates Moses’ anger, but it is not his sin. Nor is his sin in striking the rock.

Rather, his sin is in speaking so as to imply that what follows is his miracle—not God’s.

12. trust Me Just as Israel, who did not “trust Me” (14:11), must die in the wilderness (14:23), so must Moses and Aaron.

in the sight of the Israelite people Their sin was aggravated because it was witnessed by all of Israel.

this congregation The new generation, now eligible to enter the Land—an indication that this event takes place in the 40th year.

tion for God’s being so angry with Moses (and with Aaron, who seems to be a bystander at worst). Rashi points out that Moses’ striking the rock (rather than speaking to it) diminished the greatness of the miracle. Ḥananel and Ramban both fasten on verse 10: “Shall we get water for you out of this rock?” This seems to imply that Moses and Aaron present themselves rather than God as the source of the miracle. And why was Aaron punished? After the first strike, he could have stopped Moses from repeating his error, but did not.

Ibn Ezra and Albo criticize Moses for “needing to be told” to work a miracle instead of being confident that God would work one for the people (after all, Moses presumed to anticipate a miracle in the showdown with Korah). Several modern commentators fault Moses for using a tactic that had worked in an earlier generation (see Exod. 17:6) but was inappropriate for this generation.

Perhaps the most persuasive explanation is that offered by Maimonides in the 12th century and Hirsch in the 19th century. Moses was punished for losing his temper and losing pa-

tience with the people, calling them “rebels,” striking the rock (and then striking it a second time) in exasperation with the people. (One suspects he would as readily have struck the complainers with his staff.) “When a prophet loses his temper, his gift of prophecy abandons him” (BT Pes. 66b).

One might conclude that God’s decree of death in the wilderness for Moses and Aaron was not so much a punishment as a recognition that their time of leadership was over. They were emotionally worn out by having led the people for so long. In some cases, there was a two-generation gap between them and their followers. Moses and Aaron were not sinners; they were the right leaders for the Exodus, for Sinai, for establishing the tabernacle. They were not the right people to lead a younger generation into battle.

11. the community and their beasts drank The people drank like beasts, each person concerned solely with easing his or her own thirst. Only when we share with others what we ourselves also crave, do we rise above the animal level and become truly human.

My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them.”¹³ Those are the Waters of Meribah—meaning that the Israelites quarrelled with the LORD—through which He affirmed His sanctity.

¹⁴From Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom: “Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the hardships that have befallen us; ¹⁵that our ancestors went down to Egypt, that we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and that the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and our ancestors. ¹⁶We cried to the LORD and He heard our plea, and He sent a messenger who freed us from Egypt. Now we are in Kadesh, the town on the border of your territory. ¹⁷Allow us, then, to cross your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from wells. We will follow the king’s highway, turning off neither to the right nor to the left until we have crossed your territory.”

¹⁸But Edom answered him, “You shall not pass through us, else we will go out against you

13. Israelites quarrelled with the LORD They had quarrelled only with Moses, but their real object was God.

affirmed His sanctity Although Moses and Aaron defied God, God continued to supply the Israelites with water, and thereby caused His name to be sanctified in Israel.

ENCOUNTER WITH EDOM (vv. 14–21)

After the abortive attempt to enter Canaan from the south (14:40–45; see v. 25), Israel attempts to enter from the east, across the Jordan River. To reach the Jordan from their base at Kadesh, however, they must go north through Edomite territory.

14. The text closely resembles formal address

15. dealt harshly with us Hebrew: *va-yarei-u lanu*; one rabbinic rendering is: “they made us seem harsh, bad.” To justify their cruel treatment of us, they proclaimed that we were evil and deserving of persecution.

לֹא־הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישְׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֹן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם: ¹³ הָמָּה מִי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר־רָבוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם: ס

¹⁴ וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה מַלְאָכִים מִקְדָּשׁ אֶל־מֶלֶךְ אֲדוֹם כֹּה אָמַר אַחִיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מְצַאֲנֵנוּ: ¹⁵ וַיִּרְדּוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ מִצְרַיִם וַנֵּשֶׁב בְּמִצְרַיִם יָמִים רַבִּים וַיִּרְעוּ לָנוּ מִצְרַיִם וְלֹאֲבֹתֵינוּ: ¹⁶ וַנִּצְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע קֹלֵנוּ וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָךְ וַיִּצְאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְהִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ בְּקְדָשׁ עִיר קְצֵה גְבוּלְךָ: ¹⁷ נַעֲבְרָה־נָא בְּאֶרְצְךָ לֹא נַעֲבֹר בַּשָּׂדֶה וּבַכָּרְם וְלֹא נִשְׁתֶּה מִי בְּאֵר דֶּרֶךְ הַמַּלְאָךְ נֵלֶךְ לֹא נִשָּׂה יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל עַד אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲבֹר גְבוּלְךָ: ¹⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲדוֹם לֹא תַעֲבֹר בִּי פֶן־

in letters that was common throughout the ancient Near East: beginning with the addressee (“to the king of Edom”), followed by the addresser (“thus speaks your brother Israel”), and then the message (“You know . . .”).

your brother The personification of a people in the singular is frequently found in direct address (see Exod. 14:26). Here the personification is that of a brother or a kinsman.

hardships Israel’s misfortunes are emphasized solely to elicit sympathy.

16. He sent a messenger Literally: “angel,” which, although at variance with the standard view, is found elsewhere (see Exod. 33:2).

17. king’s highway The main route through the length of Transjordan.

and our ancestors The reference is not only to the parents and grandparents of the current generation. When Israel suffers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah in heaven feel their pain (Num. R. 19:15).

with the sword.”¹⁹ “We will keep to the beaten track,” the Israelites said to them, “and if we or our cattle drink your water, we will pay for it. We ask only for passage on foot—it is but a small matter.”²⁰ But they replied, “You shall not pass through!” And Edom went out against them in heavy force, strongly armed.²¹ So Edom would not let Israel cross their territory, and Israel turned away from them.

²²Setting out from Kadesh, the Israelites arrived in a body at Mount Hor.²³ At Mount Hor, on the boundary of the land of Edom, the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,²⁴ “Let Aaron be gathered to his kin: he is not to enter the land that I have assigned to the Israelite people, because you disobeyed my command about the Waters of Meribah.”²⁵ Take Aaron and his son Eleazar and bring them up on Mount Hor.²⁶ Strip Aaron of his vestments and put them on his son Eleazar. There Aaron shall be gathered unto the dead.”

²⁷Moses did as the LORD had commanded. They ascended Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community.²⁸ Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments and put them on his son Eleazar, and Aaron died there on the summit of the mountain. When Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain,²⁹ the whole community knew that Aaron had breathed his last.

turning off neither Literally, “we will not stray.”

21. To avoid the land of Edom, the Israelites must now journey south toward the Red Sea.

THE DEATH OF AARON (vv. 22–29)

22. arrived On the 1st of *Av* (see 33:38).

24. gathered to his kin This idiom is used only of Israel’s forefathers, never of women or of non-Israelites. It means “reunited with his ancestors” and refers to the afterlife in Sheol.

24. Let Aaron be gathered to his kin Literally, “. . . gathered to his people.” Let his good qualities now enter into the souls of those

בַּחֶרֶב אֶצְאָ לְקִרְאָתָךְ: ¹⁹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַסְלָה נַעֲלֶה וְאִם־מִימִיךָ נִשְׁתַּה אֲנִי וּמִקְנִי וּנְתַתִּי מִכֶּרֶם רֶק אִין־דָּבָר בְּרַגְלִי אֶעֱבְרָה: ²⁰ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תֵעָבֵר וַיֵּצֵא אֱדוֹם לְקִרְאָתוֹ בְּעַם כְּבֹד וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה: ²¹ וַיִּמָּאֵן אֱדוֹם נִתֵּן אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹבֵר בְּגִבְלוֹ וַיִּטּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַלְיוֹ: פ

²² וַיִּסְעוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־הָעֵדָה הַזֶּה הַהָר הַהוּר: ²³ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן בְּהַר הַהָר עַל־גְּבוּל אֶרֶץ־אֱדוֹם לֵאמֹר: ²⁴ יֵאָסֶף אַהֲרֹן אֶל־עַמְּיוֹ כִּי לֹא יָבֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל אֲשֶׁר־מְרִיתֶם אֶת־פִּי לְמִי מְרִיבָה: ²⁵ קַח אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־אֱלֶעָזָר בְּנָו וְהֵעַל אֹתָם הַר הַהָר: ²⁶ וְהִפְשַׁט אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְהִלְבַּשְׁתָּם אֶת־אֱלֶעָזָר בְּנָו וְאַהֲרֹן יֵאָסֶף וַיָּמָת שָׁם:

²⁷ וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה וַיַּעֲלֶה אֶל־הַר הַהָר לְעֵינָי כָּל־הָעֵדָה: ²⁸ וַיִּפְשַׁט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיִּלְבַּשׂ אֹתָם אֶת־אֱלֶעָזָר בְּנָו וַיָּמָת שָׁם בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָר וַיִּירַד מֹשֶׁה וְאֱלֶעָזָר מִן־הָהָר: ²⁹ וַיִּרְאוּ כָּל־הָעֵדָה כִּי גֹעַ אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבְכּוּ

disobeyed My command To sanctify God’s name, which Moses and Aaron failed to do when they attributed the miracle to their own powers.

26. Strip Aaron of his vestments Eleazar had already been anointed as his father’s successor so that he could take his place whenever his father became incapacitated or ritually impure (see Lev. 6:15).

29. the whole community knew Because Eleazar was wearing Aaron’s garments.

living Israelites who knew him, that those qualities not be lost even after his death.

All the house of Israel bewailed Aaron thirty days.

אֶת־אֶהֱרֹן שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל: 8

21 When the Canaanite, king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negeb, learned that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he engaged Israel in battle and took some of them captive. ²Then Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, “If You deliver this people into our hand, we will proscribe their towns.” ³The LORD heeded Israel’s plea and delivered up the Canaanites; and they and their cities were proscribed. So that place was named Hormah.

כא וַיִּשְׁמַע הַכְּנַעֲנִי מֶלֶךְ־עֲרָד יָשֵׁב הַנֶּגֶב כִּי בָא יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּרֹךְ הָאֲתָרִים וַיִּלָּחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשָּׁב | מִמֶּנּוּ שָׁבִי: ² וַיִּדַר יִשְׂרָאֵל נָדַר לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־נָתַן תַּתֵּן אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּיָדֵי וְהִחַרְמְתִּי אֶת־עָרֵיהֶם: ³ וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַכְּנַעֲנִי וַיִּחַרֶם אֶתְהֶם וְאֶת־עָרֵיהֶם וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם חֲרֻמָּה: 9

⁴They set out from Mount Hor by way of the Sea of Reeds to skirt the land of Edom. But

⁴ וַיֵּצְאוּ מִהֹר הָהָר דְּרֹךְ יַם־סוּף לְסָבֵב אֶת־אֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם וַתִּקְצַר נַפְש־הָעָם בְּדֶרֶךְ:

thirty days This is an indication of Aaron’s importance, because mourning ordinarily lasts for only 7 days (see Gen. 50:10). To be sure, Jacob was mourned for 70 days (Gen. 50:3), but that was in accordance with Egyptian practice.

under ban” (*heirem*). This was an extreme form of self-denial. Troops were not salaried in ancient times and were recompensed only by receiving a share of the booty. To dedicate all booty to God is an act of selflessness intended to win the support of the deity.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE CANAANITES (21:1–3)

THE BRONZE SNAKE (vv. 4–9)

Israel “turns away” from the Edomites (20:21) and encounters the Canaanites of the Negeb.

While rounding the land of Edom near the Red Sea, the Israelites fall to complaining once again about the lack of food and water. This, the last of Israel’s wilderness complaints, is the most grievous, because this time it is in open defiance of the Lord Himself.

- 1. **dwelt** Hebrew: *yoshev*; also be understood as “ruled.”
- 2. **Israel** For the vow to be effective it had to be taken by every soldier.
- 3. **proscribe** Hebrew: *v’haḥaramti*; literally, “put

4. **Sea of Reeds** Hebrew: *yam suf*. Here it refers to the Red Sea. (The Israelites had crossed the

29. All the house of Israel bewailed Aaron
In contrast, later (Deut. 34:8) we will read that “Israelites [but not all Israel] bewailed Moses.” Moses, the voice of judgment, was respected—but Aaron the peacemaker was universally loved.

CHAPTER 21

1. **learned** Literally, “heard.” What did the king of Arad hear? That Aaron and Miriam had died. At that point he attacked Israel, suspecting that without those two righteous leaders,

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

20:29. thirty days This verse and Deut. 34:8 are the biblical precedents for the 30-day mourning period of *sh'loshim*. For 30 days after burial (*sh'loshim*), the bereaved (the spouse, siblings, children, and parents of the deceased) do not attend dances or parties, although they may attend a wedding ceremony (BT MK 22b). Shaving is also prohibited except if necessary to earn a living, and then only after *shiv-ah*, the first 7 days of mourning. Informational radio and television programming is permitted to the mourner during *sh'loshim*. For children mourning parents, the mourning practices extend for 12 months, except that reciting the mourner’s *Kaddish* ends after 11 months.

the people grew restive on the journey,⁵ and the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food.”⁶ The LORD sent *seraph* serpents against the people. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died.⁷ The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Intercede with the LORD to take away the serpents from us!” And Moses interceded for the people.⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a *seraph* figure and mount it on a standard. And if anyone who is bitten looks at it, he shall recover.”⁹ Moses made a copper serpent and mounted it on a standard; and when anyone was bitten by a serpent, he would look at the copper serpent and recover.

וַיִּדְבֹר הָעָם בְּאֱלֹהִים וּבַמֹּשֶׁה לְמָה
הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לָמוֹת בְּמִדְבָר כִּי אֵין
לָחֶם וְאֵין מַיִם וְנַפְשָׁנוּ קָצָה בַלֶּחֶם
הַקָּלָקָל: ⁶ וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה בָּעָם אֶת
הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשְּׂרָפִים וַיִּנְשָׁכוּ אֶת־הָעָם
וַיָּמָת עִם־רַב מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: ⁷ וַיָּבֹא הָעָם
אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ חָטָאנוּ כִּי־דַבְּרָנוּ
בִּיהוָה וְנָכַךְ הַתַּפְּלִל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיִּסַּר
מֵעֲלֵינוּ אֶת־הַנְּחָשׁ וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל מֹשֶׁה בְּעַד
הָעָם: ⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲשֵׂה לָךְ
שָׂרָף וְשִׂים אֹתוֹ עַל־נֹס וְהָיָה כָּל־הַנְּשׁוּף
וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וְחָי: ⁹ וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה נְחָשׁ נְחָשֶׁת
וַיִּשְׁמְהוּ עַל־הַנֹּס וְהָיָה אִם־נִשָּׁף הַנְּחָשׁ
אֶת־אִישׁ וְהִבִּיט אֶל־נְחָשׁ הַנְּחָשֶׁת וְחָי:

וַיִּסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאֶבֶת:

¹⁰The Israelites marched on and encamped

Sea of Reeds upon leaving Egypt; see Exod. 13:18, 15:4,22.)

5. the people spoke against God and against Moses The opposite of Israel’s attitude when they crossed the Sea of Reeds: “they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses” (Exod. 14:31).

6. seraph The verb *saraf* means “burn.” Here it refers to the serpent’s poisonous bite.

8. seraph figure A winged snake similar to the Egyptian winged cobra. Its image, engraved on a bronze bowl inscribed with a Hebrew name,

was found in the excavation of the royal palace of Nineveh, dating to the end of the 8th century B.C.E. It was believed that looking at it would generate healing. Note, too, that winged snakes are found on many Judahite seals of the pre-exilic period. Contrast this with the winged angelic beings in Isa. 6.

9. copper Hebrew: *n’hoshet*; better: “bronze” (see Comment to Exod. 25:3). Note the wordplay between it and *nahash* (serpent). Abravanel explains that the color of the poisonous snakes could be imitated only by *n’hoshet*.

Israel’s morale and sense of unity would falter (Israel of Ruzhin).

6. Why are the Israelites punished with serpents for the sin of complaining? Tradition has it that because the serpent caused Adam and Eve to transgress by means of clever words, the serpent would always be the instrument of punishing people who sin with words (Num. R. 19:22). Why did Moses’ bronze serpent heal them? According to the Mishnah, it directed the people’s thoughts heavenward as they looked up at it (RH 3:8), just as Moses’ raised arms directed people’s attention heavenward in their battle with Amalek (Exod. 17:11). The *Zohar* explains that looking at the bronze ser-

pent reminded the people of why they deserved to be punished, and that is the first step toward repentance and forgiveness (*Sh’lah* 175). Finally, Hirsch suggests that the image of the serpent reminded people of how dangerous the journey through the wilderness was, and how much they depended on God to guide them through it.

In anti-idolatry reforms, King Hezekiah destroyed Moses’ bronze serpent, because it had become an object of veneration (2 Kings 18:4). Religion often runs the risk of having people ascribe excessive holiness to one of God’s instruments, losing sight of God to whom it points.

at Oboth. ¹¹They set out from Oboth and encamped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness bordering on Moab to the east. ¹²From there they set out and encamped at the wadi Zered. ¹³From there they set out and encamped beyond the Arnon, that is, in the wilderness that extends from the territory of the Amorites. For the Arnon is the boundary of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. ¹⁴Therefore the Book of the Wars of the LORD speaks of "...Waheb in Suphah, and the wadis: the Arnon ¹⁵with its tributary wadis, stretched along the settled country of Ar, hugging the territory of Moab..."

¹⁶And from there to Beer, which is the well where the LORD said to Moses, "Assemble the people that I may give them water." ¹⁷Then Israel sang this song:

Spring up, O well—sing to it—

¹⁸The well which the chieftains dug,
Which the nobles of the people started
With maces, with their own staffs.

And from Midbar to Mattanah, ¹⁹and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth, ²⁰and from Bamoth to the valley that is in the country of Moab, at the peak of Pisgah, overlooking the wasteland.

THE ROUTE THROUGH TRANSJORDAN
(vv. 10–20)

This section offers a summary of the stations of Israel's march through Transjordan, given in fuller form in 33:41–49.

12. wadi Zered A "wadi" is a ravine through which a stream flows. (The word is from Arabic; in Hebrew it is *nahal*.) In present-day Israel most wadis are dry except during the rainy season. The wadi Zered (present-day Wadi el-Hesa), however, contains a perennial stream; it is 35 miles (56 km) long and flows into the southeastern end of the Dead Sea.

13. Arnon A perennial stream flowing mid-way into the eastern end of the Dead Sea through

¹¹ וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֹבֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְעֵי הַעֲבָרִים
בְּמִדְבַּר אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי מוֹאָב מִמִּזְרַח
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: ¹² מִשָּׁם נִסְעוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּנַחַל זֶרֶד:
¹³ מִשָּׁם נִסְעוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ מֵעֵבֶר אַרְנוֹן אֲשֶׁר
בְּמִדְבַּר הַיַּצָּא מִגְּבוּל הָאֱמֹרִי כִּי אַרְנוֹן
גְּבוּל מוֹאָב בֵּין מוֹאָב וּבֵין הָאֱמֹרִי:
¹⁴ עַל-פְּנֵי יֵאמָר בְּסֹפֶר בְּסֹפֶר מִלְחָמַת יְהוָה
אֶת-וְהֵב בְּסוּפָה וְאֶת-הַנְּחָלִים אַרְנוֹן:
¹⁵ וְאֲשֶׁר הַנְּחָלִים אֲשֶׁר נָטָה לְשֶׁבֶת עַר
וַנִּשְׁעַן לְגְבוּל מוֹאָב:

¹⁶ וּמִשָּׁם בְּאֵרָה הוּא הַבְּאֵר אֲשֶׁר אָמַר
יְהוָה לְמֹשֶׁה אֲסֹף אֶת-הָעָם וְאֶתְנָה לָהֶם
מַיִם: ¹⁷ ס אַז יִשָּׁר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-
הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת

עָלִי בְּאֵר עֲנוּ-לָהּ:

¹⁸ בְּאֵר חֲפְרוּהָ שָׂרִים

כְּרוּהָ נְדִיבֵי הָעָם

בְּמַחֲקָק בְּמִשְׁעֲנֹתָם

וּמִמִּדְבַּר מִתְּנָה: ¹⁹ וּמִמִּתְּנָה נַחְלֵיאל

וּמִנַּחְלֵיאל בְּמוֹת: ²⁰ וּמִבְּמוֹת הַגִּיאָ אֲשֶׁר

בְּשֹׁדָה מוֹאָב רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה וַנִּשְׁקָפָה עַל-

פְּנֵי הַיַּם יָמֵן: פ שביעי [רביעי]

the Wadi el-Mujib, a tremendous ravine that at one point is 2.5 miles (4 km) wide and 1650 feet (500 m) below the tops of the adjoining cliffs. The Arnon unites the waters of a complex of wadis.

territory The Israelites marched in the wilderness that lies to the east of the territories of the Moabites and Amorites.

14. Book of the Wars of the LORD According to Ibn Ezra, this was a separate book which, like the Book of Jashar (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18), was an anthology of early songs describing the saga of Israel's battles at the beginning of its national existence.

17. Then Israel sang Similar words introduce the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1).

17. Encouraged by early military victories, sustained by having found oases in the wilder-

ness, Israel is now a singing community, grateful and reinvigorated.

²¹Israel now sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, ²²“Let me pass through your country. We will not turn off into fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from wells. We will follow the king’s highway until we have crossed your territory.” ²³But Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory. Sihon gathered all his people and went out against Israel in the wilderness. He came to Jahaz and engaged Israel in battle. ²⁴But Israel put them to the sword, and took possession of their land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as [Az] of the Ammonites, for Az marked the boundary of the Ammonites. ²⁵Israel took all those towns. And Israel settled in all the towns of the Amorites, in Heshbon and all its dependencies.

²⁶Now Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against a former king of Moab and taken all his land from him as far as the Arnon. ²⁷Therefore the bards would recite:

“Come to Heshbon; firmly built
And well founded is Sihon’s city.

²⁸For fire went forth from Heshbon,
Flame from Sihon’s city,
Consuming Ar of Moab,
The lords of Bamoth by the Arnon.

²⁹Woe to you, O Moab!

VICTORY OVER SIHON (vv. 21–32)

Moving northward along the eastern (wilderness) edge of Moab, Israel now seeks peaceful passage through the Amorite kingdom of Sihon as it did with Edom. Sihon confronts Israel with an armed force.

21. Israel now sent messengers Either at Moab’s boundary from Iye-abarim (v. 11) or from the ford of the Arnon, which separates the Moabites and the Amorites (v. 13).

24. put them to the sword That is, Sihon’s army.
Jabbok One of the main eastern tributaries of the Jordan River.

25. its dependencies Literally, “its daughters.” In this and in similar contexts, the distinc-

21 וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל מַלְאָכִים אֶל-סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ-הָאֱמֹרִי לֵאמֹר: 22 אָעֲבָרָה בְּאַרְצֶךָ לֹא נֹטֵה בְשָׂדֵה וּבְכָרֶם לֹא נִשְׁתֶּה מִי בְּאֵר בְּדֶרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ נִלְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר-נִעְבַר גְּבֻלְךָ: 23 וְלֹא-נָתַן סִיחֹן אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹבֵר בְּגְבֻלוֹ וַיִּקְאַסֶּף סִיחֹן אֶת-כָּל-עַמּוֹ וַיֵּצֵא לְקִרְאֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמִּדְבָּרָה וַיָּבֵא יְהִצָּה וַיִּלָּחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: 24 וַיַּכֵּהוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִי-חֶרֶב וַיִּירָשׁ אֶת-אַרְצוֹ מֵאֲרֹנֵן עַד-יַבֹּק עַד-בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן כִּי עָז גְּבוּל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן: 25 וַיִּקַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת כָּל-הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל-עָרֵי הָאֱמֹרִי בְּחֶשְׁבֹּן וּבְכָל-בְּנֵי-הָיָה:

26 כִּי חֶשְׁבֹּן עִיר סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי הוּא וְהוּא נִלָּחֵם בְּמֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב הָרֵאשֹׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶת-כָּל-אַרְצוֹ מִיַּדוֹ עַד-אַרְנֹן: 27 עַל-כֵּן יֹאמְרוּ הַמְשָׁלִים

בָּאוּ חֶשְׁבֹּן תִּבְנֶה
וְתִכְוֹנֵן עִיר סִיחֹן:
28 כִּי-אֵשׁ יִצְאָה מִחֶשְׁבֹּן
לְהִבֶּה מִקְרִית סִיחֹן
אֶכְלָה עַר מוֹאָב
בְּעַלְי בְּמוֹת אֲרֹנֵן:
29 אוֹי-לְךָ מוֹאָב

tion between “mother” and “daughter” is that between walled city and open village.

27. bards Hebrew: *ba-moshlim*, those who recite *m’shalim* (sing. *mashal*)—from the stem *משל* (to be like). *M’shalim* included proverb, parable, riddle, and allegory. They could vary from pithy folk maxims to longer artistic compositions, such as Job’s discourses and the contents of the Book of Proverbs. They also included taunt songs mocking a foe, such as the following poem, which first recalls the gloating of the newly defeated Amorites over the previously defeated Moabites.

28. fire went forth This image is frequently used for a ravaging army.

Ar A city or district near the Arnon River.

29. Woe Hebrew: *oi*, which also occurs as

You are undone, O people of Chemosh!
His sons are rendered fugitive
And his daughters captive
By an Amorite king, Sihon.”

³⁰Yet we have cast them down utterly,
Heshbon along with Dibon;
We have wrought desolation at Nophah,
Which is hard by Medeba.

³¹So Israel occupied the land of the Amorites.

³²Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its dependencies and dispossessed the Amorites who were there.

³³They marched on and went up the road to Bashan, and King Og of Bashan, with all his people, came out to Edrei to engage them in battle.

³⁴But the LORD said to Moses, “Do not fear him, for I give him and all his people and his land into your hand. You shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites who dwelt in Heshbon.” ³⁵They defeated him and his sons and all his people, until no remnant was left him; and they took possession of his country.

אָבִדְתָּ עַם־כִּמּוֹשׁ
נָתַן בָּנָיו פְּלִיטִים
וּבְנֹתָיו בַּשְּׁבִיית
לְמֶלֶךְ אַמְרִי סִיחֹן׃
וַיִּנְרָם אָבִד
חֶשְׁבֹן עַד־דִּבּוֹן
וַיִּנְשִׂים עַד־נֹפַח
אֲשֶׁר* עַד־מִדְבָּא׃

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ הָאֲמֹרִי׃ ³² וַיִּשְׁלַח
מֹשֶׁה לְרַגֵּל אֶת־יַעֲזָר וַיִּלְכְּדוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּירֶשׁ
וַיִּירֶשׁ אֶת־הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם׃

וַיִּפְּנוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ דֶרֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן וַיֵּצֵא עוֹג
מֶלֶךְ־הַבָּשָׁן לִקְרֹאתָם הוּא וְכָל־עַמּוֹ
לְמַלְחָמָה אֲדָרְעִי׃ ³⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־
מֹשֶׁה אַל־תִּירָא אֹתוֹ כִּי בְיָדִי נָתַתִּי אֹתוֹ
וְאֶת־כָּל־עַמּוֹ וְאֶת־אֶרְצוֹ וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ
כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לְסִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר
יָשָׁב בְּחֶשְׁבֹן׃ ³⁵ וַיִּכּוּ אֹתוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו
וְאֶת־כָּל־עַמּוֹ עַד־בְּלֹתֵי הַשְּׂאִיר־לוֹ שָׂרִיד

v. 30. נקוד על ר

hoi. Exclaimed when facing death (1 Kings 13:30; Jer. 22:18) or predicting catastrophe (Isa. 3:9,11).

people of Chemosh Chemosh was the national deity of Moab. The phrase refers to the Moabites, just as the Israelites are called “the people of YHVH.”

are rendered Literally, “he rendered.” The god Chemosh willingly surrenders his subjects. In the ancient Near East, a nationwide disaster was often considered the result of a decision made by the national deity.

VICTORY OVER OG (vv. 33–35)

The campaign against Og differs from that against Sihon. No messengers are sent requesting passage, because the way across the Jordan has already been secured with the victory over Sihon. Also, whereas the battle against Sihon is undertaken at Israel’s initiative (the name of God does not appear in vv. 21–32), here the campaign against Og is expressly commis-

sioned by the Lord (v. 34). The land of Og, in contrast to Sihon’s land, is part of the Promised Land, which includes the Bashan (34:10–11). Thus the Lord commands the conquest of the Bashan as part of the conquest of Canaan.

33. Bashan This includes the area bounded by Mount Hermon to the north, Jebel Druze to the east, the hills east of the Sea of Galilee to the west, extending to about six miles (10 km) south of the Yarmuk River.

Og An Amorite. The prophet Amos described the Amorites as a people “Whose stature was like the cedar’s / And who was stout as the oak” (Amos 2:9). Og himself was remembered as the last of the giant Rephaim (Deut. 3:11; see also 2 Sam. 21:16–22).

Edrei Identified with modern Der’a, it was located near the Yarmuk River and the desert, probably at the southeast border of Og’s kingdom.

22¹The Israelites then marched on and encamped in the steppes of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho.

וַיֵּרְשׁוּ אֶת־אֲרָצוֹ: 1 וַיִּסְעוּ בְּנֵי
כב יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּעַרְבֹת מוֹאָב
 מֵעֵבֶר לְיַרְדֵּן יְרִיחוֹ: * ס

22:1. This verse is a transition to the last third of the Book of Numbers, which deals with events that occurred and laws that were given at the banks of the Jordan before entry into the Promised Land. The point of origin of this last stage of the march is not given.

steppes of Moab The eastern portion of the lower Jordan plain before it empties into the Dead Sea.

opposite Jericho At the point of the Jordan River located at Jericho.

* For the haftarah for this portion, see p. 909.

הַפְּטָרָה חֻקָּת

HAFTARAH FOR ḤUKKAT

JUDGES 11:1–33

(When Ḥukkat and Balak are combined, recite the haftarah for Balak.)

This *haftarah* describes an event of controversy and contention between the Israelite and non-Israelite populations of Gilead during the early period of settlement in the Land. The chapter that precedes the *haftarah* relates how the Israelites abandoned the Lord, serving alien gods, and were punished with years of oppression by the Philistines and Ammonites (Judg. 10:6–9). Eventually the Israelites repented and “removed the alien gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could not bear the miseries of Israel” (Judg. 10:16). When the Ammonites again mustered their troops against Israel (v. 17), the officers of Gilead said: “Let the man who is the first to fight the Ammonites be chieftain over all the inhabitants of Gilead” (v. 18). The *haftarah* describes the emergence of that man, the initial diplomatic maneuvers, and the ensuing war.

The narrative moves from the oppression of leaderless Israelites to their military victory under the leadership of Jephthah who had been an outcast freebooter. Jephthah ruled Israel for six years and was buried in the territory of Gilead (Judg. 12:7). (Nothing is said about Israelite piety in the aftermath of his victories or about any period of peaceful respite, reports that are so characteristic elsewhere in the Book of Judges.)

The passages of the *haftarah* are dominated by negotiations and reports of negotiations between Jephthah and the elders of Gilead as well as between the Israelites led by Jephthah and alien kings. Issues of inheritance and property are at the heart of the negotiations. In the opening situation, the future hero is dispossessed of his own inheritance and treated as an outsider. His brothers successfully conceal their greed behind the mask of law. Jephthah responds by living as an outlaw, marauding with his gang until he is sum-

moned back to Gilead as the leader of its army. Negotiations with the Gileadite officers redress the original imbalance, and the new good faith is sealed with oaths and agreements.

During Jephthah’s negotiations with the king of the Ammonites, a pair of diplomatic exchanges tries to redress an international property grievance against the Israelites, but their substance is rebuffed by Jephthah. The Ammonites allege that the lands east of the Jordan River (between the Arnon and Jabbok Rivers) are theirs alone. Thus they hope to dispossess the Israelites from what the latter had conquered many years earlier from the Amorites (when that nation refused free passage to the wandering Israelite tribes and attacked them without cause). Indeed, the Ammonite desire to establish dominion over those lands (concerning which the Ammonites have never laid claim) strikes Jephthah as so contrived as to suggest dubious intent. The Ammonite refusal to justify their claim in the face of his challenge proves their bad faith, and Jephthah goes to war.

On the eve of battle he vows that if he returns home safe and victorious he will offer to the Lord as a burnt offering “whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me” (11:31). This is a final example of how a formal legalism can lead to violent ends. (After the end of the *haftarah*, the conclusion of chapter 11 relates the personal disaster that ensues when his own daughter is first to come out to meet him and he declares that he cannot retract his vow [vv. 34ff.]. The focus of the *haftarah*, however, is not his personal vow and its consequences, but national disputes and battles.)

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

Jephthah’s messengers to the Ammonite king cite Moses’ request that the Edomites and Amorites

allow the Israelites to pass freely through their territory at the time of the wilderness trek (as told in the *parashah*, Num. 20–21). This is done to reject the claim that the Israelites now occupy Ammonite lands. Indeed, the historical facts recited indicate that the land under dispute had been conquered by the Israelites from the Amor-

ites. These facts support the Gileadite cause. The failure of subsequent Ammonite (and Moabite) generations to challenge this situation is taken by Jephthah as further proof that the status quo had long been accepted as legitimate. Nevertheless, the issue merited a diplomatic presentation before beginning hostilities.

11 Jephthah the Gileadite was an able warrior, who was the son of a prostitute. Jephthah's father was Gilead; ²but Gilead also had sons by his wife, and when the wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out. They said to him, "You shall have no share in our father's property, for you are the son of an outsider." ³So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the Tob country. Men of low character gathered about Jephthah and went out raiding with him.

⁴Some time later, the Ammonites went to war against Israel. ⁵And when the Ammonites attacked Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah back from the Tob country. ⁶They said to Jephthah, "Come be our chief, so that we can fight the Ammonites." ⁷Jephthah replied to the elders of Gilead, "You are the very people who rejected me and drove me out of my father's house. How can you come to me now when you are in trouble?" ⁸The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Honestly, we have now turned back to you. If you come with us and fight the Ammonites, you shall be our commander over all the inhabitants of Gilead." ⁹Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "[Very well,] if you bring me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD delivers them to me, I am to be your commander." ¹⁰And the elders of Gilead answered Jephthah,

Judges 11:8. commander Hebrew: *rosh*, an old designation for tribal elders as judges (cf. Exod. 18:25; Deut. 1:15; Num. 30:2, 32:28). It was also used for the elders of patriarchal clans (e.g., 1 Chron. 5:7, 12, 15, 24). Both senses are per-

tinient in this case (especially because Jephthah had been dispossessed from his ancestral property, which led to the Gileadite promise that his holdings would be restored to him, along with other benefits).

יא ויפתח הגלעדי היה גבור חיל
והוא בן-אשה זונה ויולד גלעד את-
יפתח: ² ותלד אשת-גלעד לו בנים
ויגדלו בני-האשה ויגרשו את-יפתח
ויאמרו לו לא-תנחל בבית-אבינו כי
בן-אשה אחרת אתה: ³ ויברח יפתח
מפני אחיו וישב בארץ טוב ויתלקטו
אל-יפתח אנשים ריקים ויצאו
עמו: פ
⁴ ויהי מימים וילחמו בני-עמון עם-
ישראל: ⁵ ויהי כאשר-נלחמו בני-עמון
עם-ישראל וילכו וקני גלעד לקחת את-
יפתח מארץ טוב: ⁶ ויאמרו ליפתח לכה
והיית לנו לקצין ונלחמה בבני עמון:
⁷ ויאמר יפתח לוקני גלעד הלא אתם
שנאתם אותי ותגרשוני מבית אבי
ומדוע באתם אלי עתה כאשר צר לכם:
⁸ ויאמרו וקני גלעד אל-יפתח לכן עתה
שבנו אליך והלכת עמנו ונלחמת בבני
עמון והיית לנו לראש לכל ישרי
גלעד: ⁹ ויאמר יפתח אל-וקני גלעד
אם-משיבים אתם אותי להלחם בבני
עמון ונתן יהוה אותם לפני אנכי אהיה
לכם לראש: ¹⁰ ויאמרו וקני-גלעד אל-

“The LORD Himself shall be witness between us: we will do just as you have said.”

¹¹Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their commander and chief. And Jephthah repeated all these terms before the LORD at Mizpah.

¹²Jephthah then sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, saying, “What have you against me that you have come to make war on my country?” ¹³The king of the Ammonites replied to Jephthah’s messengers, “When Israel came from Egypt, they seized the land which is mine, from the Arnon to the Jabbok as far as the Jordan. Now, then, restore it peaceably.”

¹⁴Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites. ¹⁵He said to him, “Thus said Jephthah: Israel did not seize the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites. ¹⁶When they left Egypt, Israel traveled through the wilderness to the Sea of Reeds and went on to Kadesh. ¹⁷Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Allow us to cross your country.’ But the king of Edom would not consent. They also sent a mission to the king of Moab, and he refused. So Israel, after staying at Kadesh, ¹⁸traveled on through the wilderness, skirting the land of Edom and the land of Moab. They kept to the east of the land of Moab until they encamped on the other side of the Arnon; and, since Moab ends at the Arnon, they never entered Moabite territory.

¹⁹“Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon. Israel said

יִפְתָּח יְהוָה יְהוָה שָׁמַע בֵּינוֹתֵינוּ אִם-לֹא
כְּדַבְרֶךָ בֵּן נַעֲשֶׂה:

¹¹וַיֵּלֶךְ יִפְתָּח עִם-זַקְנֵי גִלְעָד וַיְשִׁימוּ הָעָם
אוֹתוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם לְרֹאשׁ וּלְקָצִין וַיְדַבֵּר יִפְתָּח
אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרָיו לְפָנֵי יְהוָה בַּמִּצְפָּה: פ

¹²וַיִּשְׁלַח יִפְתָּח מַלְאָכִים אֶל-מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי-
עַמּוֹן לֵאמֹר מַה-לִּי וְלָךְ כִּי-בָאתָ אֵלַי
לְהִלָּחֵם בְּאַרְצִי: ¹³וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹן
אֶל-מַלְאָכָיו יִפְתָּח כִּי-לָקַח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-
אֶרֶץ בְּעֻלּוֹתָיו מִמִּצְרַיִם מֵאֲרָנוֹן וְעַד-
הַיַּבֵּק וְעַד-הַיַּרְדֵּן וְעַתָּה הִשְׁיבָה אֶתְהֵן
בְּשָׁלוֹם:

¹⁴וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד יִפְתָּח וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים
אֶל-מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן: ¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר* לוֹ כֹּה אָמַר
יִפְתָּח לֹא-לָקַח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-אֶרֶץ מוֹאָב
וְאֶת-אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן: ¹⁶כִּי בְעֻלּוֹתָם
מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּמִּדְבָּר עַד-יַם-
סוּף וַיָּבֹא קְדֻשָּׁה: ¹⁷וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל
מַלְאָכִים | אֶל-מֶלֶךְ אֱדוֹם | לֵאמֹר
אֶעֱבְרָה-נָא בְּאַרְצְךָ וְלֹא שָׁמַע מֶלֶךְ אֱדוֹם
וְגַם אֶל-מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב שָׁלַח וְלֹא אָבָה וַיֵּשֶׁב
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקְדֻשׁ: ¹⁸וַיֵּלֶךְ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיָּסֹב
אֶת-אֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם וְאֶת-אֶרֶץ מוֹאָב וַיָּבֹא
מִמִּזְרַח-שֶׁמֶשׁ לְאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב וַיַּחֲנוּן בְּעֵבֶר
אֲרָנוֹן וְלֹא-בָאוּ בְּגְבוּל מוֹאָב כִּי אֲרָנוֹן
גְּבוּל מוֹאָב:

¹⁹וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל מַלְאָכִים אֶל-סִיחֹן
מֶלֶךְ-הָאֱמֹרִי מֶלֶךְ חֶשְׁבּוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ

v. 15. סבירין ומטעין לשון רבים

10. witness . . . we will do Hebrew: *shomei-a . . . na-aseh*; this language expresses the reciprocity of a treaty. The word *shomei-a* literally means “hearer”—one who hears the terms of the treaty. Moreover, the clause “we will do just as you have said” is part of the operative language of the agreement. (Both terms together—“doing” and

“hearing”—shed light on the famous formula of compliance made by the Israelites at the conclusion of the covenant at Mount Sinai: *na-aseh v'nishma* [Exod. 24:7]. That phrase would thus seem to have a more precise legal sense than the rendering “we will faithfully do” or even the more literal “we will do and obey [or: hear].” Appar-

to him, 'Allow us to cross through your country to our homeland.'²⁰ But Sihon would not trust Israel to pass through his territory. Sihon mustered all his troops, and they encamped at Jahaz; he engaged Israel in battle.²¹ But the LORD, the God of Israel, delivered Sihon and all his troops into Israel's hands, and they defeated them; and Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that land.²² Thus they possessed all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

²³"Now, then, the LORD, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites before His people Israel; and should you possess their land? ²⁴Do you not hold what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So we will hold on to everything that the LORD our God has given us to possess.

²⁵"Besides, are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he start a quarrel with Israel or go to war with them?

²⁶"While Israel has been inhabiting Heshbon and its dependencies, and Aroer and its dependencies, and all the towns along the Arnon for three hundred years, why have you not tried to recover them all this time? ²⁷I have done you no wrong; yet you are doing me harm and making war on me. May the LORD, who judges, decide today between the Israelites and the Ammonites!"

²⁸But the king of the Ammonites paid no heed to the message that Jephthah sent him.

²⁹Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He marched through Gilead and Manasseh, passing Mizpeh of Gilead; and from Mizpeh of Gilead he crossed over [to] the Ammonites.³⁰ And Jephthah made the following

יִשְׂרָאֵל נַעְבְּרָה-נָא בְּאַרְצֶךָ עַד-מְקוֹמִי :
 20 וְלֹא-הָאֵמִין סִיחֹן אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבַר
 בַּגְּבֹלוֹ וַיֵּאֶסֶף סִיחֹן אֶת-כָּל-עַמּוֹ וַיַּחְנוּ
 בַּיהֲצֵה וּלְחָם עִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל :²¹ וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-סִיחֹן וְאֶת-כָּל-עַמּוֹ
 בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּכּוּם וַיִּירֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת
 כָּל-אַרְץ הָאֲמֹרִי יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ הַהִיא :
 22 וַיִּירְשׁוּ אֶת כָּל-גְּבוּל הָאֲמֹרִי מֵאֲרֹנוֹן
 וְעַד-הַיַּבֵּק וּמִן-הַמְּדַבָּר וְעַד-הַיַּרְדֵּן :

23 וְעַתָּה יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הוֹרִישׁ
 אֶת-הָאֲמֹרִי מִפְּנֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאַתָּה
 תִּירְשָׁנוּ :²⁴ הֲלֹא אֶת אֲשֶׁר יוֹרִישֶׁךָ כְּמוֹשׁ
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ אוֹתוֹ תִירֶשׁ וְאֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר הוֹרִישׁ
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִפְּנֵינוּ אוֹתוֹ נִירֶשׁ :

25 וְעַתָּה הַטּוֹב טוֹב אַתָּה מִבְּלֶק בֶּן-צְפּוֹר
 מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב הַרּוֹב רַב עִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל אִם-
 נִלְחָם נִלְחָם בָּם :

26 בְּשֶׁבֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּחֲשׁוֹן וּבְבִנְוֹתֶיהָ
 וּבְעֶרְעוֹר וּבְבִנְוֹתֶיהָ וּבְכָל-הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר
 עַל-יַדֵי אֲרֹנוֹן שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וּמִדּוֹעַ
 לֹא-הִצַּלְתֶּם בְּעֵת הַהִיא :²⁷ וְאַנְכִי לֹא-
 חָטָאתִי לָךְ וְאַתָּה עֲשֵׂה אֵתִי רָעָה
 לְהִלָּחֵם בִּי יִשְׁפֹט יְהוָה הַשֹּׁפֵט הַיּוֹם בֵּין
 בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵין בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן :

28 וְלֹא שָׁמַע מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן אֶל-דְּבָרַי
 יִפְתָּח אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֵלָיו : פ

29 וַתְּהִי עַל-יִפְתָּח רוּחַ יְהוָה וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת-
 הַגְּלָעָד וְאֶת-מְנַשֶּׁה וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת-מִצְפֵּה
 גִּלְעָד וּמִמִּצְפֵּה גִלְעָד עָבַר בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן :
 30 וַיַּדֵּר יִפְתָּח נֶדֶר לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אִם-נִתָּן

ently the formula attests to an agreement both to fulfill the covenant and to be responsible for the terms heard.)

26. three hundred years Jephthah presumably uses a round figure here, as rhetorical hyperbole. Factually, he is mistaken. Archaeological ev-

idence puts the Exodus in the late 13th century B.C.E. and the beginning of the conquest of the Land some half-century later. Thus a 15th-century B.C.E. date is difficult to account for here, because it would precede the time period of the chieftains ("Judges").

vow to the LORD: “If You deliver the Ammonites into my hands, ³¹then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the LORD’s and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering.”

³²Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites and attacked them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. ³³He utterly routed them—from Aroer as far as Minnith, twenty towns—all the way to Abel-cheramim. So the Ammonites submitted to the Israelites.

תִּתֵּן אֶת־בְּנֵי עֲמֹן בְּיָדֵי: ³¹וְהָיָה הַיּוֹצֵא
אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִדֹּלְתַי בֵּיתִי לִקְרָאתִי בְּשׁוּבִי
בְּשָׁלוֹם מִבְּנֵי עֲמֹן וְהָיָה לַיהוָה
וְהֵעֲלִיתֵהוּ עֹלָה: פ

³²וַיַּעֲבֹר יַפְתָּח אֶל־בְּנֵי עֲמֹן לְהִלָּחֵם בָּם
וַיִּהְיֶנּוּ יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ: ³³וַיִּכֹּם מֵעָרוֹ עַר וְעַד־
בוֹאֵךְ מִנִּית עֲשָׂרִים עִיר וְעַד אָבֵל כְּרָמִים
מִכָּה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד וַיִּכְנַעוּ בְּנֵי עֲמֹן מִפְּנֵי
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: פ

30. vow to the LORD A conditional offering “to the LORD.” The technical language is similar to that in the vow the nation of Israel took at the

onset of its battle with the king of Arad during the wilderness trek (Num. 21:2–3). The vow’s condition is fulfilled in v. 32.