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The Death of Isra'el's Leaders

20: 1-29



The story of **Chapter 20** returns the reader to the forward movement of **Isra'el's** camp after the interruption of the mitzvot of **Chapter 15**, rebellion of **Chapter 16**, and more mitzvot in **Chapters 17** through **19**. **Numbers 20:1a** reports that the whole community entered the Sin Desert in the first month, and they stayed in Kadesh. **The people** had traveled from Egypt in a southeasterly direction through the Sinai Peninsula to Mount Sinai. From there, they moved north to the southern edge of **the Promised Land** ([to see link click By - The Sin of Kadesh-barnea](#)), but they then turned back into **the wilderness** to wander for **forty years**. **Numbers 20:1a** places them once again at **Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin**, located in the northern-eastern part of the Sinai Peninsula. At this point in the story, **the people** are moving closer again to **the Promised Land**. Before the story resumes, virtually **the entire Exodus generation** had died. Of **those** who were over the age of twenty when the nation rejected **the Land**, only **Moshe, Aaron, Joshua** and **Caleb** remained alive.

However, just as **Chapter 20** gets the march of **Isra'el's** camp underway, it recounts a series of dramatic events that rock **Isra'el** to the core: **the death** of the leader **Miryam**; the **rebellion** against **ADONAI** by **Moshe** and **Aaron**; **Ha'Shem's** command that **Moses** and **Aaron** would not lead **Isra'el** into **the Promised Land**; the refusal of the brother nation **Edom** to allow **Isra'el** safe passage through **its** territory; and **the death of Aaron the high priest**. This series of tragic blows again interrupts the reader's sense of a moving

story and a moving **Israelite camp**. After the lies of the **spies** (see **By - The Report of the Spies**), every time **Isra'el** gets up and recovers from one of its rebellions, it is interrupted again by accounts of mitzvot, rebellion, and death.³⁹²