

KORAH

NUMBERS (BE'MIDBAR 16:1 – 18:32)

INTRODUCTION:

1. In last portion, people threatened to appoint a captain to lead them back to Egypt.
2. In this portion, instead of complaining about a particular issue – lack of water, food, etc. – the people began to rebel outright following two parallel paths.
 - a. It was widespread but those who led it were prompted by different things.
 - b. They would be destroyed by different acts of God.
3. It was attempt to overthrow Moses and Aaron amid accusations of power abuse and nepotism.
4. Many factors are believed to have fueled this rebellion.
 - a. The *kohenim* were to replace the firstborn – Korah and 250 followers were firstborn.
 - b. Korah and followers were Levites (specifically Kohathites).
 - c. Dathan and Abiram were of Reuben who lost firstborn status to Joseph.
5. Reuben's camp was situated close to Kohathites where Korah was camped.
6. After the decision that all over 20 must die, these malcontents seized upon opportunity.
 - a. When their destruction came it was obviously God's doing.
 - b. The vindication of Moses and Aaron had to be complete and without question.
7. When they came into the land, these tribes were parted from one another.
 - a. Levites were dispersed among the many tribes.
 - b. Reuben was across the river and on the outskirts of the people.
8. Interesting to consider that Korah was related to Moses – they were kinsman.
 - a. Interesting that many times, these attacks come from those related to you.
 - b. Tradition says that Korah tried to show that the laws Moses instituted were too hard.
 - c. Trying to grab power by pretending to be an advocate for the people.

CHAPTER 16: THE REBELLION

1. Verse 1: Names the ringleaders of this rebellion.
 - a. Korah (son of Kohath, son of Levi), Dathan, Abiram and On (sons of Reuben).
 - b. Tradition teaches that On's wife talked him out of following the others.
2. It says they “took” implying men but argue themselves; i.e. separated themselves from Moses.
3. Verse 2: “They rose up in the face of Moses” – in opposition to Moses.
 - a. Korah was joined with princes of the congregation – leaders of the tribes.
 - b. These were prestigious men which gave credibility to Korah's protests.
4. The term “in the face of” is לפני *lifnei*, which is the same term used of Nimrud.

“He was a mighty hunter before the LORD.” – Genesis 10:9

5. The point is that Nimrud was “before” or literally “in the face of YHVH.”
 - a. He was in opposition to God just as Korah was in opposition to Moses.
 - b. Consequently, Korah was in opposition to God as well.
 - c. Korah finds himself in the company of other rebels.

“But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion.” – Jude 1:10-11

6. Joining him were these elect men of the assembly; “men of renown.”

a. The Hebrew term is **אֲנָשֵׁי שֵׁם** *ensheh shem*.

b. This is the same term found in Genesis 6:4 that describes the *nephillim*.

“The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the **men of renown” – Genesis 6:4**

7. The only distinction made is indicated by the definite article **הַ** *hei* - **אֲנָשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם** (Gen. 6:4).

a. It is my opinion that these men of renown (authority) compelled sons of God to sin.

b. Interesting that is these “men of renown” that lead the people to rebel against God.

c. In both cases, those who submitted to their leadership died.

8. Verse 3: “You take too much upon yourselves seeing the whole congregation is holy.”

a. Fail to recognize that some were set apart from those already set apart.

b. Korah feigns to represent the people against the alleged tyranny of Moses.

9. Nimrud postures himself to speak for the good of the people against God’s “oppressive rule.”

“Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’” – Genesis 11:4

10. God had commanded to “be fruitful and multiply” which insinuates spreading out.

11. Judas pretends to want to help the poor by rebuking the woman with the ointment.

“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.” - John 12:5-6

12. So it is with rebels; they pretend to represent the people but only seek power for themselves.

a. It is pointed out that Korah avoided the individual “holiness” of people.

b. He only spoke of communal holiness; Moses spoke of the individual God chooses.

13. Instead of interceding for them, Moses falls on his face perhaps because he realized they had gone too far.

14. Verse 5: “the LORD will show who are his and who are holy.”

a. His own refers to the Levites.

b. The one who is holy would refer to Aaron the High Priest.

c. This was to address fact that Korah wanted that position for himself.

15. Verse 6: In order to determine (or validate) Moses instructed it would be accomplished through the incense service.

16. In a way, he is permitting them to function equally with Aaron and sons and God would determine who is acceptable.

- a. In other words, there is the potential for death.
 - b. Nadav and Avihu perished when they presented unacceptable incense.
17. They could prove their argument or they could die.
- a. How far gone are you when you can convince yourself this will turn out alright.
 - b. Rabbinically it is understood that, like the spies, his eye caused him to err.
18. Verse 7: Moses turns their words upon them – “you take too much upon you sons of Levi.”
- a. He continues by rebuking Korah for not being satisfied by being a Levite or Kohath.
 - b. He was one who carried the Holy furniture.
 - c. Verse 10: “Will you seek the priesthood too?”
19. Classic example of not being willing to function in your purpose.
- a. Not being content with your job and wanting the other guy’s role.
 - b. Notice the exchange between Y’shua and Peter.

“ ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Y’shua loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, ‘Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?’ When Peter saw him, he said to Y’shua, ‘Lord, what about this man?’ Y’shua said to him, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!’ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Y’shua did not say to him that he was not to die, but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’ ” – John 21:18-23

20. Peter seemed to be overly concerned about what would happen to this other disciple more so than focusing on “following” Messiah.
- a. That is the point Messiah was making – focus on what you are to do, not his job.
 - b. Korah became too focused on Aaron’s role rather than his own and erred with his eye.
 - c. His motivation was self promotion, discontent with not being the focus.
 - d. Many believers fall into this same trap.
21. Verse 11: “are gathered together against the LORD” – re. back to **לפני** *lifnei* - “in the face.”
- a. Moses acknowledges what this is really all about.
22. “As to Aaron, why do you murmur against him?” – He was not self-appointed.
23. At this point, it seems that some of the Levites including sons of Korah distanced themselves.
- a. The sons of Korah wrote many Psalms (e.g. Psalm 44 – 49).
 - b. Thus we understand that Korah’s sons weren’t destroyed.

“But the sons of Korah did not die.” – Numbers 26:11

24. Thus we learn that the Creator is able and willing to distinguish even within a household those who wish to follow Him and those who do not.

CHAPTER 16: REBELLION OF DATHAN AND ABIRAM

1. Verse 12: Dathan and Abiram, both who apparently had not been part of previous conversation were called by Moses but refuse to answer the call.
 - a. “We will not come up” is, literally, “we will not ascend.”
 - b. Rashi considers this to be a prophecy indicating they would descend.
2. Verse 13: They accuse Moses of misleading the people for the sake of power.
 - a. They say “you brought us OUT of a land flowing with milk and honey.
 - b. They apply to Egypt the words Moses used to describe Canaan.
 - c. These are also the words God uses to describe the land.

“I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”
 – Exodus 3:8

3. They accuse Moses (and by extension, God) of bringing them into the wilderness in order to kill them.
 - a. Ironically, God brought them to save them – they ended up killing themselves.
 - b. That death is result of disobedience is because disobedience is inherently deadly.
4. Go on to contend that Moses cannot bring them into Canaan.
 - a. Insinuating that the blocked passage (Amalekites and Amorites) is Moses’ fault.
 - b. This ignores the people’s culpability in this defeat.
 - c. Ignores the fact that Moses told them not to do it.
5. Verse 15: An apparently angry Moses requests “Do not respect their offering.
 - a. This would refer to the incense offering on the next day.
 - b. Accused of tyranny, Moses says “I haven’t taken one thing from them.”

CHAPTER 16: GOD PUTS DOWN THE REBELLION

1. The next day Korah “assembled all the congregation against them at the door of the *mishkan*.”
 - a. Apparently he had been able to influence a large number of the tribes.
 - b. Tares sown among the wheat is not easily uprooted without damaging the wheat.
 - c. Only the Creator has that ability.
2. Verse 21: God tells Moses and Aaron to “separate from the people that I may consume them.”
 - a. Once again, we see faithful Moses interceding for the people.
 - b. Based on fact God can discern between the guilty and those led astray by the guilty.
 - c. “Shall one man sin and you be angry with the whole congregation?”
3. Moses seeks mercy for those who don’t know what they’re doing.
 - a. Judge the guilty and spare the innocent.
 - b. David pleaded with God to spare Israel because he had sinned, not the people.

“Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, ‘Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house.’ ”
 – 2 Samuel 24:17

4. Another example is found in the account of Abraham pleading for those in S’dom.

“Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” – Genesis 18:25

5. This is indicative of those who have a heart “after God” – God is longsuffering and merciful.
6. Verse 23-26: God responds to Moses and instructs the people to separate from the rebels.
 - a. God gave them a chance to separate themselves to demonstrate their loyalty.
 - b. This was akin to what happened after the Golden Calf incident and Levi.
7. Before the destruction comes the warning to flee – God gives everyone an opportunity to live.
 - a. Lot was warned to leave with his family from S’dom before the destruction.
 - b. In fact the angels tell Lot:

“As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city. But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. And as they brought them out, one said, ‘Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away. . . . Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.’” – Genesis 19:15-17, 22

8. God doesn’t wish the righteous and guiltless to perish with the wicked and guilty.
 - a. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon them to heed the warning or they will.
 - b. Y’shua warned those inhabitants of Jerusalem.

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.” – Luke 21:20-22

9. It is responsibility of the hearers to do what they hear.
10. Verse 27: The people separate themselves from Korah, Dathan and Abiram.
 - a. Dathan and Abiram stand defiant in their tents.
11. In verse 28-29, Moses makes a bold declaration – describes destruction that would be obviously coming from God in order to put down this rebellion.
 - a. For the ground to open up and they go down into the pit, alive.
 - b. The nature of the rebellion forced Moses to outline such a harsh punishment.
 - c. Korah’s tactics are similar to the adversary – sabotoge.
 - d. Cancer has to be cut out or it will destroy the entire body.
12. God honors the prayer of the righteous: Abraham, Elijah etc.

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” – 1 Peter 3:12

13. Moses only prayed this way do dispel any doubts that God had appointed him and Aaron.
 - a. They would no longer believe anything Moses said.

- b. But if He does a new thing (literally, “create a creation”) – open the earth.
 - c. Then understand they have opposed the LORD.
 - d. By implication you should believe what I tell you comes from Him.
14. Korah’s rebellion is equivalent to:
- Not believing Moses.
 - Attempt to replace those God has chosen.
15. Consider Y’shua’s words:
- “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And they are the ones witnessing of me, and you will not come to me that you might have life . . . for if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe My Words?”**
16. Refusing to accept what Moses said is equivalent to Korah’s rebellion.
- a. Likewise, desiring to “replace” the “one” God has chosen is equal to Korah’s rebellion.
 - b. Replacement theology is equivalent to Korah’s rebellion.
17. Verse 32-33: Per Moses’ words, the earth opened and swallowed them alive.
- a. Taking them into *sheol* and everything that pertained to them.
 - b. Keeping in mind the sons of Korah survived – they separated themselves.
18. Verse 35: Simultaneously, a fire came out and destroyed the 250.
- a. These were destroyed similarly to the way Nadav and Avihu perished.

CHAPTER 17: THE AFTERMATH

1. It is interesting that those things that may have been considered unclean before, once they are consecrated, they are holy and can never be used for any other purpose.
2. Verse 2-3: The fire pans of these 250 men became holy – at the cost of their lives.
 - a. They are beaten into plates for the Brazen altar.
 - b. They serve as a reminder of their mistake.
3. It reminds Israel of who is to approach – no common man - and how – with a humble heart.
4. Verse 6: Yet on next day, Israel murmured again: “you have killed the people of the LORD.”
 - a. Perhaps they thought the incense offering was Moses’ idea knowing it would kill them.
 - b. Perhaps his prayer – “don’t respect their offering” caused their deaths.
 - c. Totally ignore responsibility of the 250 and their leaders.
5. Verse 10: This provokes the LORD to tell Moses and Aaron to separate from the people.
 - a. Prompting Moses to intercede yet again.
 - b. Perhaps God’s statement is challenge to Moses to see what he will do?
6. Verse 11: Aaron is instructed to take his fire pan and lay incense upon it to atone for people.
 - a. Noted that a plague had already started among the people.
 - b. Uses the incense service to show the people that it brings life.
 - c. They associated it with death.
7. The use of incense play vital role in Atonement ritual (Lev.16:12-13).
8. It would seem that which brings salvation for one can mean death for another.
 - a. It depends upon what is in the person’s heart.
 - b. Judgment is not necessarily a bad thing; depends on what side of law you are on.
9. Verse 13: Aaron stood between the dead and the living.

- a. The High Priest stops the plague by standing before Wrath.
 - b. Apparently, only He can stop it.
10. The tribes then told that a prince from each is to present a rod before the LORD.
- a. The one that buds is the one He had chosen.
 - b. This will cause the murmurings to cease.
11. Verse 23: The rod of Aaron budded, blossomed and “bore” ripe almonds.
- a. Word “bore” is related to *gimel* or *gamal*.
 - b. In the presence, this rod came to life and produced fruit.
 - c. Legend of things growing in the Temple.
12. The people looked upon it and, without a doubt, Aaron was the chosen High Priest.
- a. God had chosen the one who had borne fruit.
13. The rod was to be placed before the ark as a “token” or אֹתוֹ *ote* – sign.
- a. The sign was to remind them not to murmur against God or His chosen vessels.
 - b. The pot of manna was stored in the *mishkan* as well.
 - c. The people had disdained both these items or what they represented.
14. People’s response to this is a fear that anyone who happened too close to *mishkan* would die.
- a. No, there is a proper way to approach.
 - b. Yet, to approach God requires that we die to ourselves.
15. Still in the next chapter, the Levites are reminded that they are to safeguard the *mishkan* to prevent someone from dying.

CHAPTER 18: INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LEVITES

1. Verse 1: Reiterated that Aaron and Levites have responsibility to safeguard the Sanctuary.
 - a. Perhaps given here in response to the people’s fears.
 - b. By doing their job they would protect Israel from an outcome just experienced.
2. It is clear in the text that where the Levites were to safeguard *mishkan* and protect Israelites, the priests were to safeguard the “holies” and protect the Levites.
3. Verse 19: “covenant of salt” – an everlasting covenant.
 - a. Salt protects from putrefaction and symbolizes permanence.
 - b. The offerings presented by Israel are given to the priests forever.
4. Verse 21: The Levites are cared for as well by receiving 1/10 (tithe) of crops of the people.
 - a. This refers to the “first tithe” taken from crops which go exclusively to the Levites.
 - b. There are other tithes that do not go to the Levites but for other purposes.
5. Verse 26: the Levites were to set apart a “tithe of the tithe” for “the LORD” i.e. the priests.
 - a. Were not to use the tithe that had been given to them until this was done.
 - b. After this was done they would bear no sin in eating what had been tithed to them.