

“Korah, What Were You Thinking?”

Numbers Chapter 16

The 40 years in the wilderness described in the scriptures are highlights or “instant replays” of important events that occurred during that time.

- We have read the fringe people grumbling for meat causing the entire camp to grumble
- We have seen 10 spies cause the entire camp to not want to obey the Lord and inhabit the land.
- We have read where Miriam and Aaron confront Moses and the Lord judges them.

We now come to another incident known as Korah’s Rebellion.

We will see God deals decisively with Rebellion.

God will judge Korah and two other men who were central in this rebellion

God will judge the 250 who were with him

God will judge 14700 of the congregation who complain

Num 16:1 **1) Korah and Moses Square Off** vs 1-19a

Korah

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *action*,

Num 16:2 and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown.

- Korah wasn’t just some plain Joe who is contrary to Moses. He was a Levite, he was a Kohathite, he was very influential. He had formed an alliance with 250 influential, chosen, famous, men who were leaders of the congregation.
- He was a natural leader. But he seeks to operate in the kingdom naturally as well.
 - He sees Moses and says “I can do that”
 - He believes if he were in charge he would do things different (better)
 - He is focused in what he should do not what the people need or what God is doing
 - In grievance, he doesn’t go to Moses privately but raises issues publicly first
- Moses was related. Moses was from Kohath but from a different son of Kohath than Korah. **Numbers 26:58-59**
- **Numbers 4:15** listed the duties of the Kohathites. “*When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy objects and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them, so that they will not touch the holy objects and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.*”

Num 16:3 They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

- Proverbs 13:10 “*Only by pride cometh contention*”
- Jude 1:10-11 in a discussion about men of ambition creeping in the congregation Paul compares them to Korah “*But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.*”
- Korah is dissatisfied with the role he has in the congregation. He wants a greater role. (see verse 16-18)
- He states two arguments: (He over states the condition or falsely represents the condition)
 - *All the Congregation are Holy* - They are holy in that God separated them from other nations. But they do not act holy nor do they walk in faith and trust in God that the holy should.
 - *You (Moses) exalt yourself above the assembly* - Moses didn’t place himself in this role. It is a strong leadership role that God called him to and governs
- Here is a bewildering and disturbing scenario found in ministry. A person in ministry with you has an issue. Instead of being leader enough to go to you and deal with it they demonstrate their leadership ability by going to other people and get group support first. Then what is even worse, the group, who are leaders also, think this guy is right and a better leader.

- Num 16:4 **When Moses heard *this*, he fell on his face;**
Moses
- Moses' so called self exaltation looks like this: on his face before the Lord.
 - Being a humble man probably sought the Lord to examining his heart to see if there was any truth to Korah's words. And he possibly was interceding to the people.
 - This is a great beginning place in defending yourself.
 - Examining yourself first,
 - Getting Direction from the Lord rather than your own feelings.
 - I've done both. The former works out much better than the latter.
- Num 16:5 **and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His, and who is holy, and will bring *him* near to Himself; even the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself.**
- Num 16:6 **"Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and all your company,**
 Num 16:7 **and put fire in them, and lay incense upon them in the presence of the LORD tomorrow; and the man whom the LORD chooses *shall be* the one who is holy. You have gone far enough, you sons of Levi!"**
- Moses has direction. God will answer Korah's accusation.
 - He will show who is His
 - He will show who is Holy
 - He will bring His Holy Chosen near to Himself
 - "*You have gone far enough*" - Moses used Korah's own words to challenge and get Korah's attention. Moses, through prayer knows the outcome of this demonstration.
- Num 16:8 **Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi,**
 Num 16:9 **is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the *rest of* the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them;**
- Num 16:10 **and that He has brought you near, *Korah*, and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking for the priesthood also?**
- The Lord has already separated Korah and the Levites from others. They are already Chosen Holy.
 - They have been assigned to camp on the south side right next to the Tabernacle. God had already drawn them close.
 - They were responsible to care for the Most Holy furnishing in the tabernacle.
 - It wasn't enough for Korah and his delegation. This speaks of ingratitude for the ministry granted to him. The NKJV phrases it "*Is it a small thing to you...*"
- Num 16:11 **"Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD; but as for Aaron, who is he that you grumble against him?"**
- The rebellion is not against Moses. Because the Lord had set up the priesthood (not Moses) the accusation is against the Lord.
 - I would guess that Korah and group are not in the least thinking this is so. There are times in my thinking that I am so convinced that I am right that I refuse to see the truth. Moses went to the Lord in prayer. He found the truth. We do not see anywhere where Korah fell on his face in prayer.

Num 16:12 Then Moses sent a summons to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said,
The Other 2 "We will not come up.

Num 16:13 "Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also lord it over us?"

Num 16:14 "Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

- Dathan and Abiram were called to Moses. They are given the chance for their own opportunity to deal with issues properly. And from Moses' perspective to have an opportunity to see how they have fallen into Korah's rebellious spell.
- They refused to go up and speak but attacked from afar.
- Verse 13 "*Is it not enough that you*" - not even original words. Parroting their leader Korah.
- Verse 13 Egypt was their "*land flowing with milk and honey*" not the Land God Chose.
- Verse 14 They charged Moses with lack of performance. While Moses may hold some blame concerning agreeing to send spies in the Land instead of inhabiting the Land, it was these very leaders that sided with the 10 faithless spies and refused to enter in.
- Dathan and Abiram are defiant against Moses' authority.

Num 16:15 Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, "Do not regard their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them."

Moses
Prays and
instructs
Korah for
the
showdown

- Moses is losing patience. Where does he go? To prayer again.
- How often should we go to the Lord when in a difficult situation? Whenever we need to! If losing patience, getting angry, confused, or hurt these are good times to fall before the Lord.
- Moses is confident that he walks in integrity. It is such a help to have integrity in the midst of an attack on your character.
- Paul addressed the same sense of integrity with the Ephesians.
 - Acts 20:26-27,33,35 "*Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak*"

Num 16:16 Moses said to Korah, "You and all your company be present before the LORD tomorrow, both you and they along with Aaron.

Num 16:17 "Each of you take his firepan and put incense on it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD, two hundred and fifty firepans; also you and Aaron *shall each bring his firepan.*"

Num 16:18 So they each took his *own* censer and put fire on it, and laid incense on it; and they stood at the doorway of the tent of meeting, with Moses and Aaron.

Num 16:19 Thus Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

- Moses tells Korah and his group to come up before the Lord with a censer of incense. This was the duty of the Priesthood. Moses is telling them to come on up and do the duty of a Priest before the Lord. Aaron will do the same. We will see who the Lord chooses for the priesthood.

2) God Decides Who Will Lead vs 19b-39

And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.

- Moses Aaron and God vs. Korah, Dathan, Abiram, 250 leaders and the whole congregation.
- A few vs. the majority Who will win?

Num 16:20 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

Num 16:21 "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly."

- Good advice for us with regard to grumblers and divisive people.
- Titus 3:10-11 *"Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned."*
- Romans 16:17-18 *"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."*

Num 16:22 But they fell on their faces and said, "O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?"

- Moses prays again. 3rd time. How many for Korah? "ZERO" At least he is consistent.
- Matthew 5:44 *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,"*
- Moses saw that all these men are somewhat a victim of one man's sin. So he intercedes for the congregation.

Num 16:23 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:24 "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'"

Num 16:25 Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him,

- The Elders that were appointed earlier in numbers followed Moses.

Num 16:26 and he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin."

Num 16:27 So they got back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram;

- You bet they got back.

and Dathan and Abiram came out *and* stood at the doorway of their tents, along with their wives and their sons and their little ones.

Num 16:28 Moses said, "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing.

- The Lord will demonstrate who the true authority is and who appoints leaders and priests.

Num 16:29 "If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, *then* the LORD has not sent me.

Num 16:30 "But if the LORD brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the LORD."

- Moses is not just telling the congregation the outcome. He is putting a "If / Then" scenario before them so they can think it through themselves when they see what is about to happen.

Num 16:31 As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open;

Num 16:32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions.

Num 16:33 So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

Num 16:34 All Israel who *were* around them fled at their outcry, for they said, "The earth may swallow us up!"

Num 16:35 Fire also came forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.

- Not only did Korah, Dathan and Abiram and all their possessions. The earth closed up over them as if they never existed.
- **Numbers 26:9-11** "*The sons of Eliab: Nemuel and Dathan and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram who were called by the congregation, who contended against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured 250 men, so that they became a warning. The sons of Korah, however, did not die.*"
 - It seems that Dathan and Abiram's families perished with them. Korah's family did not. It is possible that the Lord makes a distinction concerning those who are infected with rebellion and those who are not. Quite possibly Korah's sons did not follow in their father's rebellion and stood away from him in judgment.
 - **Psalms 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87, and 88** assert that the "sons of Korah" were entrusted with arranging and singing them
- Those nearby took off running for fear they will be swallowed by the earth.
- Also, fire came and consumed the 250 that assumed priesthood duties without the Lord's choosing.

Num 16:36 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:37 "Say to Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, that he shall take up the censers out of the midst of the blaze, for they are holy; and you scatter the burning coals abroad.

Num 16:38 "As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered sheets for a plating of the altar, since they did present them before the LORD and they are holy; and they shall be for a sign to the sons of Israel."

Num 16:39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as a plating for the altar,

Num 16:40 as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no layman who is not of the descendants of Aaron should come near to burn incense before the LORD; so that he will not become like Korah and his company—just as the LORD had spoken to him through Moses.

- The censers were collected from the carnage of Korah's companions.
- God had a use for the censers. He had Eleazar take them and hammer them out and fastened to the Alter as a constant reminder for all Israel.
- To remind them that NO LAYMAN CAN COME NEAR THE ALTER. It is the Lord's choosing.

Num 16:41 **3) The Congregation's Confusion** vs 41-50

But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD'S people."

- "The Next Day" - This isn't years later when they might have forgotten the details of yesterday.
- This is what unthankfulness and grumbling produces. It taints the truth. Moses and Aaron didn't cause the death. Rebellion and a spurning the Lord caused this.

- We hear the same thing when people resist the Lord and say it because God allows war and death.
- James 4:1-2 "*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.*"
- Man typically seeks to blame others and usually does so without all the information.

Once again, Let's see how Moses and Aaron handle conflict. How do they handle this problem?

Num 16:42 It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared.

Num 16:43 Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting,

Num 16:44 and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:45 "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly." Then they fell on their faces.

- Conflict came and their response is a great lesson for us in handling
 - "They Turn" - They changed their focus. It is very easy to become discouraged and defeated when our only focus are the problems before us. Moses and Aaron TURN. They change the direction of what they were looking to. They turned from the problem. They turned toward the Lord. (His presence in the tent of meeting)
 - "They Came" - They were committed to the Lord's direction. Coming to the front of the tent of meeting was a determination to follow the Lord's answer for the difficulty. They were not going to handle this with their own natural abilities.
 - "They Fell" - They surrendered in prayer trusting that God was fully capable of taking care of all the parties involved. Them, The Congregation and Even God's Own Name.
- When they Turned to the Lord - **The Lord was Present**
Matthew 7:7 "*seek, and you will find;*"
- When they Came to the Lord - **The Lord Spoke**
John 6:37 "*the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.*"
- When they Fell before the Lord - **A Perfect Plan was Realized**
Jeremiah 33:3 "*Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*"

Num 16:46 Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the LORD, the plague has begun!"

Num 16:47 Then Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people.

Num 16:48 He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked.

- "The Plague Has Begun" v. 46 - In prayer it was revealed to Moses that judgment was occurring at that very moment. God demonstrates His wrath against rebellion. But God had given Moses a plan.
- Moses had a true shepherd's heart. It is a shepherd who after dealing with stubborn unthankful sheep will have love enough to do what he can to intercede and prevent even God's judgment. The ambitious Korah's would be satisfied with judgment on the sheep as long as it didn't touch him. Korah's though would be they brought it on themselves.
- Aaron, The High Priest was to take a censer with the fire from the altar and stand in the mist of the congregation.
- Aaron stood between the Living and the Dead.
 - Firefighters would stand between the burning forest and the untouched timber, placing themselves in the middle. The purpose is to stop the destruction, and preserve the remaining.
 - The censer is a demonstration of prayer. This was intercessory prayer. Life and death prayer.

- The Church needs its intercessors. People who will pray as if life depended upon it.
- Like Aaron, we too take our stand at the front lines to stop the destruction and preach the gospel to preserve the remaining.
- The Plague was checked. It ceased.
- This is a beautiful picture of Jesus
 1. Running into the mist of the congregation - Coming from heaven to earth
 2. Unjustly accused and rejected by the people
 3. Praying, Interceding for our sake for our life depended upon it
 4. Jesus stands in as the dividing point between us and the plague of death.
 Believers in Christ were all rightly destined to perish without His Intercession. For Us, The Plague was checked.

Num 16:49 But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah.

Num 16:50 Then Aaron returned to Moses at the doorway of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been checked.

- Aaron had begun acting like a High Priest should. God wanted to settle the question about Aaron's selection. Chapter 17 establishes his divine call even further.

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