

NUMBERS 16:1-15 (SET UP FOR A FALL)

While reading the verses of Numbers, a few things need to be remembered. With each turn of the page, and with each act of rebellion, moaning, distrust, or faithless conduct, we need to remind ourselves that everything, from the plagues upon Egypt until the turning of the people away from Canaan in punishment, fell into a period of about two years.

During that time, they saw the plagues, they saw – and continued to see – the pillar of cloud and fire. They saw the sea opened up, and they passed through it on dry ground. They gathered manna each day, and they drank from the rock when no other source of water was available.

Those same people, who had seen and experienced all of that, were the same who have done nothing but moan, distrust, and rebel against the Lord. Now, in their punishment, which is a result of their own faithless conduct, they continue to act in the same way.

It is the constant story of Israel in her history as well. Through judges, kings, and even in the coming of their Messiah, they rejected the Lord, shook their fist in His face, and they have suffered the consequences for it. These things are given to us to warn us against the same things popping up in our own lives.

Jude reaches back to this account in Numbers 16, along with a few other references to their history, to do exactly that... to warn us.

Text Verse: “Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. ⁹Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” ¹⁰ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know

naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” Jude – 8-11

Jude is one last sobering reminder of the need to hold fast to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Let us contend earnestly for that faith, and let us be strong in the Lord. The way to do that is to know what the Lord expects, and to learn those lessons which have been given to us as examples.

This chapter is memorable simply because of the effects that are given in it concerning God’s judgments. What we read, and then picture in our minds as we are reading, is more vibrant than the best Hollywood effects studio can whip up. But these things actually happened. The people really rebelled, and the judgment of God really came upon them.

Let’s remember this as we read, and let us be warned as we go. For those in Christ, we are secure, but the judgments of God will come upon those who reject Him. The warning to us then is to be prepared to share the message of Christ to those who will otherwise face their own time of meeting the Lord in judgment. Hear the word, process it in your mind, and then be prepared to tell others about it, while there is time. This is a lesson we can learn from passages like Numbers 16. It is a memorable part of His superior word. And so let’s turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Korah’s Rebellion (verses 1-3)

¹ Now Korah

The Hebrew here is extremely complicated and translations vary widely. The analysis of this first verse took over two hours, and certainly not all of what is to be drawn out from it is included here. So much is tied up in it, that one could probably use it as the basis for a Master's thesis.

The verse actually begins with the word *v'yiqah qorakh*, or "And took Korah." It is a masculine singular verb indicating that Korah is the one who "took," and thus he is the leader of the entire affair. After that, one must figure out what Korah took. The NKJV ends with, "took men."

That would mean all of the names mentioned are chief perpetrators, and they then took the 250 men mentioned in verse 2 along in their conspiracy. Some say that Korah took Dathan and the others then mentioned in this verse, meaning as in a conspiracy of just these men. No matter which is correct, it is Korah who initiates the taking – *v'yiqah qorakh*, "And took Korah..."

In Israel's time of biblical history, there are several infamous names. Korah, or *Korakh*, is one of them. His name comes from one of two seemingly unrelated roots. First, there is *qarakh*, meaning "to make bald." The second is *qerekh*, meaning "frost," or "ice." However, the two ideas probably meet in the bald appearance of mountains when covered in ice. His name probably means, "baldy." Maybe when he was born, he was completely bald and they chose the name based on that.

The important aspect of this context-wise is that the law of presumptuous sin was just given in the previous chapter. It even had an example of punishment upon a Sabbath-breaker to show the severity of the law. After that, the note concerning the tassels on the garments was given. That was to be as a reminder concerning the commandments of the law. All of that is thrown to the wind in the turn of a single page with the words *v'yiqah qorakh*, or "And took Korah." He is...

¹ (con't) **the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi,**

Korah is the son of Izhar. The name signifies “double light” and thus “noon,” may be referring to the time of day he was born. Izhar is then noted as the son of Kohath, and he the son of Levi. This genealogy of Korah has already been referred to in Exodus 6, but now it is reintroduced, highlighting this individual who will be the leader in a severe attack against Moses and his authority.

This is all the more poignant because Moses and Korah are cousins. Moses’ father, Amram, is the older brother of Izhar, Korah’s father. But more, Izhar is the second son of Kohath, and yet Korah was not made the chief of the tribe of Kohath as recorded in Numbers 3. Instead, that title was granted to the son of Uzziel, the fourth son of Kohath.

Therefore, once again, Moses is faced with a challenge to his authority right from his own family by a bitter, jealous relative. Like Aaron and Miriam who came against him in Chapter 12, his cousin has arisen against him. He now comes...

¹ (con't) **with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab,**

The name Dathan is rather difficult to pin down because the root is not Hebrew. It is probably either a Persian word meaning “law” or an Aramaic word meaning “fountain.” In Deuteronomy 33:2 it uses the term *esh dath*, translated by some as “fiery law” –

“The Lord came from Sinai,
And dawned on them from Seir;
He shone forth from Mount Paran,
And He came with ten thousands of saints;
From His right hand
Came a fiery law for them.” Deuteronomy 33:2

Considering what happens to Dathan in the coming verses, it may be that, regardless of what the parents were thinking when they named him, the Lord wants us to consider his name from the perspective of meaning “Their Law.” Abiram means Exalted Father, or My Father is Exalted. Eliab means My God is Father.

^{1 (con't)} **and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*;**

On means something like Vigor or Strength. Peleth means Swiftness. They are the sons of Reuben. However, Peleth is never mentioned anywhere else as a son of Reuben. In Numbers 26, there is a son, Pallu, who may be the same person. Peleth, then, may be a nickname, or he may be a person simply never named again. If it is the same person, then On is the uncle of Dathan and Abiram. It is, honestly, a very difficult verse to tie down.

The connection between the Levites of Korah and these sons of Reuben is in their placement around the sanctuary. In Numbers 2, it was noted that the tribe of Reuben was located on the south, or right, side. In Numbers 3, it was seen that the Kohathites of Levi were also stationed on the south, or right side. Thus, an alliance between the two was probably forged due to their close proximity.

One can almost sense the jealousy which arose in the conversations of these men. Both Reuben as a tribe, and Kohath as a family of Levi, are stationed together on the south. Reuben was the firstborn, but lost his right to that generations ago. Now Judah is the lead tribe. The priestly class comes from Kohath, but only through Aaron. All of the rest of the Kohathites are simply Levites, subordinate to the Aaronic priests.

Together, they might feel that they should have a right to those honors which they have not been granted by the Lord through Moses, or to that which was taken from them by their ancestor Jacob. While they are talking, Korah moans and complains and Dathan and Abiram moan and complain.

Together, they form a band called the Moaners, and they set out to rock the order of things. At least, that is how I imagine it...

² and they rose up before Moses

The words, “and they rose up before Moses,” do not mean a literal rising up and standing before him at this point. It means that they have initiated a rebellious coup against him, and they intend to carry it through to their sanctification. It is done openly and thus is a challenge to his authority in front of the whole congregation.

^{2 (con't)} with some of the children of Israel,

It is inferred from Numbers 27:3 that this rebellion included people of any given tribe within the congregation. There it says, “Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the Lord, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons.” Because this person was from Manasseh, it is assumed that a general group of people came forward.

^{2 (con't)} two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown.

These words appear to indicate that it is a general coup from leaders throughout the congregation. The term *nasiy* is used. It signifies one who is lifted up, and thus a chief, prince, leader, and so on. It is the same term used to indicate the overall leaders of the tribes that were named earlier in Numbers.

³ They gathered together against Moses and Aaron,

This shows that there is no doubt that this is a seditious rebellion wrought out of jealousy. Moses is the leader, and Aaron is the high priest. These miscreants are disturbed by the hierarchy that has been fashioned. That is evidenced with the next words...

^{3 (con't)} **and said to them, “*You take too much upon yourselves,***

The words are simple and direct, *rav lakem* – “much for you.” How to translate it, however, is more complicated, and so translations vary widely, guessing what the intent of the words mean. The later words in this same verse, however, give a good indication as to what is being relayed.

In essence, they accuse Moses and Aaron of some type of tyrannical rule, and that rule has gone on long enough. But it is Moses who, just five chapters earlier, asked the Lord to take the burden of his alone carrying all of the people off of him. He already had leaders of thousands, hundreds, and tens based on the recommendation of Jethro.

He also had seventy selected men who then were endowed with the Spirit that was on him to further help with the administration of the congregation. If anything, Moses wanted *less* responsibility, not more. But he also faithfully carried the load placed upon him according to the Lord’s directives.

^{3 (con't)} **for all the congregation *is* holy, every one of them,**

The statement is true in one way, but it is not true in another. In Leviticus 20:26, it said, “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord *am* holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.” Thus, there is a state of holiness because of their separation to the Lord. However, Leviticus 11:44 says –

“For I *am* the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I *am* holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Just because someone is set apart as holy, it does not mean they are holy. A person in Christ is said to be sanctified, past tense, by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:2 and elsewhere. And yet, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4 that it is God’s will that we become sanctified through proper living. And so there is a positional holiness, and there is a state of holiness which can and should be maintained. The two are not the same.

^{3 (con’t)} **and the Lord *is* among them.**

Again, the statement is true, but it is not necessarily true in the same way at all times. The Lord is among them, dwelling in the tabernacle in their midst. However, He is not among them in the sense of unlimited access. If any approached Him, they had to come with an offering, and they could only bring it to a certain point and no further, from there, the priests – acting as mediators – would continue the rituals laid out by the Lord.

Even the priests were limited in their access to the Lord, as was made clear in the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. However, the rebellion is one of attempting to usurp the positions of Moses and Aaron, and thus it is an attempt to enter into a direct relationship with the Lord without mediatorial assistance.

In essence, it is an attempt to return to paradise, meaning direct fellowship with the Lord, based on self, and not on the Lord’s redemptive design. This is evident from the next words...

^{3 (con’t)} **Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”**

Two different words are used in this verse – *edah*, or congregation, and *qahal*, or assembly. One is the natural organization of Israel. The other is the assembly which is divinely called as set apart. Korah has, in essence, said that the natural organization is holy, and thus they are all equal within the divinely called assembly. He is making what is known as a category mistake by applying one truth, in one context, to another which falls under a different context. This is a chronic problem which continues on in the church today. If everyone in the church is holy, then it must logically follow that everyone in the church is entitled to leadership within the church. That is a fallacy in thought which has led to true disaster because it fails to consider the context of what words mean.

Paul says in Galatians 3:28 that, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The amount of poor theology which has arisen from taking that single verse out of its intended context is astonishing. The amount of damage to the church because of it is no less astounding.

This is what Korah is doing, and the same failure to properly contextualize the Lord’s words remains alive 3500 years later. He has accused Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves above others, but their positions and duties were not their choice. Rather, they were the Lord’s choice. If there is exaltation of either man, it is because the Lord has so exalted him. Moses sees the danger in what lies ahead and he reacts accordingly...

Holy and set apart to the Lord as such

And yet we have our own part, it is true

Yes, we are holy to the Lord, but in ourselves how much?

There are things we are also expected to do

God has set us apart because of faith in Jesus

But we must set ourselves apart as well

This is what God expects of each one of us

*And only in our conduct can anybody tell
Are we set apart by God and yet living in the flesh?
Or have we truly set ourselves apart as holy?
Let us live our lives in Christ, anew and afresh
Let us live our lives before Him in pure sanctity*

II. The Put-up Job (verses 4-11)

⁴ So when Moses heard *it*, he fell on his face;

There may be one or several reasons for this action. First, he is certainly acting in humility by placing himself in a lower position as a man, despite being in the greater position of authority. In essence, “How can I be exalting myself if I am willing to humble myself?” Thus, it is an act of petition for reason from Korah.

Further, he may be making an act of petition to the Lord, who he knows is watching, that He not suddenly strike out in wrath. Thus, it is an act of petition for mercy from the Lord. And third – based on the first two – it may be that in accord with the Lord’s wisdom, he is asking the Lord to vindicate him before the people. There, on his face before God and man, he responds...

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 cause *him* to come near to Him.

Moses responds first with one word, *boqer* – “morning.” It is the morning light that will reveal the truth or falsity of the claim Korah has made. In that revealing, he then says that it is the Lord who will be behind it. If it is true

that the whole congregation is holy, and it must be because the Lord has already said as much, then there must be varying degrees of holiness within it. Or, it must be true that Korah has a valid complaint against Moses. The Lord will reveal, and He will do so in the morning.

Paul, writing to his young protege Timothy, cites the substance behind this verse when giving him advice concerning two apostates, Hymenaeus and Philetus. After relaying those words, he then told Timothy, “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.” Indeed, Korah has failed to see that a distinction exists between the Lord’s calling of a people as holy, and the people’s varied states of holiness within that calling. Moses relays to Korah, without directly stating it, that there is a reality within the congregation which he has failed to observe. The Lord will reveal that when...

^{5 (con’t)} **That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him.**

The words indicate honor. The person who is chosen as holy will be recognized as such by drawing him near to Him. However, the words also ring an ominous tone. If one is chosen, then another will not be chosen. If one is to draw near to Him, then the other will be separated from Him. The words of James, coming a bit less than 1500 years later, would have been wisdom for Korah to consider before going any further –

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” James 4:7-10

Unfortunately for Korah, that wisdom was many centuries late in arriving, but the words are still not heeded by most in the world, another two

millennia later. Korah failed to submit to God, he failed to resist the devil, he did not draw near to God, and God did not draw near to him. His hands were dirty, his heart was impure, and his thoughts about himself, and his relationship with the Lord were confused. Instead of being lifted up by the Lord, he will fall in the opposite direction.

⁶ Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company;

Censers, although only cited in Scripture in relation to religious observances, appear to be found in every home. For Moses to direct over 250 people to take censers means that they were obviously common implements at the time. Moses is, with these words, in essence saying, “Ok, you want to be the priests, then go get your censers and you can be priests if the Lord accepts you.” And let’s be sure to not just bring your censers, but be sure to...

⁷ put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow,

The rebels are instructed to put fire in them, meaning burning coals. They were to then put incense on those coals as an offering before the Lord. This is actually an order which is in complete violation of the law itself, and thus it stands in Moses’ mind that the law itself is already broken, and the honor of the Lord has already been violated. Thus, there is only one remedy that he sees as fitting to the circumstances, I would call it a put-up job.

Miriam-Webster defines a put-up job as “something that is secretly arranged or decided at an earlier time in order to trick or deceive someone.” Well, I would never accuse Moses of attempting to deceive anyone, but he is in the process of arranging, in advance, a known outcome with an unsuspecting group of people who have no idea it is coming. The only deception, however, is found in Korah’s inability to access his short term memory combined with his own lack of understanding of the law. Moses is to be counting on that.

The errors which these men will commit before the Lord are several. First, they are not priests. Only Aaron and his sons could function as priests. Secondly, because they were not of the line of Aaron, they were also not consecrated to conduct priestly duties. Both the lineage and the consecration were necessary.

Next, each took a censer. These were censers not fashioned for use in the sanctuary, and which had not been part of the consecration process. The word for censer in Hebrew is *makhtah*. It comes from a root which means terror, ruin, or destruction. It is a fitting concept in regards to what occurs. Fourth, they are instructed to come together to offer incense. Offering incense was a duty which was only to be conducted by one attending priest at a time.

Fifth, incense offered in a censer is only specified as being done by the high priest. According to the law, it is never noted as an offering made by anyone but him. The incense offered by the other priests was burnt in the golden altar in the holy place, or along with offerings on the brazen altar, but never in censers.

Sixth, they are bringing their own incense which is not according to what the Lord has prescribed to be burnt before Him. We know this because the incense for the Lord was forbidden to anyone else. Should they make it, they were to be cut off from their people. Whatever incense they offered, then, was considered profane.

Seventh, if they brought their own censer, then they also brought their own fire. Thus, their fire is also profane. According to Leviticus 16:12, the high priest was to take the fire for the incense from the brazen altar which had been sanctified by the Lord's fire. It is the same fire which had been ignited by the Lord at the time of the ordination offering. This is the fire that was to never be extinguished from that first time it was lit. It is a celestial fire, having been sanctified by Yehovah himself.

Instead of using this fire, sanctified by the Lord, they will bring their own, profane, fire. The law was written, every infraction is to receive its punishment, and high handed sins were considered as capital crimes. Moses knows this. There can only be one outcome from his words, if in fact he is correct concerning the matter. The Lord will reveal the truth of it in the morning. As he says...

^{7 (con't)} **and it shall be *that* the man whom the Lord chooses *is* the holy one.**

If one is chosen, one is not. Nadab and Abihu were chosen, and yet through improper conduct of their duties, they died before the Lord. Korah and his men have not, as of yet, been chosen. If in fact the Lord doesn't accept them, they should expect no less. However, in their folly, they presumptuously think that being called as a part of a holy congregation determines that they are, in fact, holy.

As I said earlier, it is a category mistake which, unfortunately, permeates the church. For example, people who are specifically forbidden from teaching and preaching presumptuously ignore God's word, they ignore the context within God's word, and they chase their folly to their own shame. Though we are not under law, but under grace, we still have a future judgment lying ahead of us. That will be for reward and loss. One thing is certain, the Lord will never grant a reward for a deed done in disobedience. The end never justifies the means. How much more when one is under law!

^{7 (con't)} ***You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!***

rav lakem bene levi – “Much for you, sons of Levi!” Moses turns Korah's exact words back on him. “Much for me? Ha! Much for you.” You think I've taken on too much, wait till you see what's coming, Cheese-wizz.” Here, he addresses all through Korah. He is the chief instigator. He is the Levite who wants to be high priest, and he is the one who is presumptuous against the Lord.

Everyone else is included in the address, but it is Korah who stands for them, and it is Korah who also stands for all of Levi who might, in the future, presume to assume what he has now assumed. Moses hints that apparently Levi has had enough authority already, and too much. They have, through this display, proven themselves unworthy of the honor that has been bestowed upon them in their special appointment before the Lord...

⁸ Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi:

A second address to Korah begins, but it is as before, one address to all of Levi, of whom Moses is also counted. It is a petition for reason among his own brothers. The wording requires attention though. Moses first speaks to Korah and all of Levi. The verbs are plural in verse 9. However, the address goes to Korah only and the verbs will change to the singular in verse 10...

⁹ *Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them;*

Moses has identified with Levi because they are his tribe. However, more than that, they are the Lord's tribe. Here he emphatically calls the Lord, the God of Israel, to remind them that it was deity, not his humanity, which called them to their station. It was in Numbers 8 that Levi was set apart to the service of the Lord and as a gift to the priesthood of Aaron.

Here he uses a term not seen before, *mishkan Yehovah*, or “tabernacle of the Lord.” It is His dwelling, and He has called Levi into a special relationship at that dwelling. They were to minister and serve between the priests and the congregation. Moses now substantially repeats what the Lord said back then in Numbers 8.

¹⁰ and that He has brought you near to *Himself*, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you?

As I said, the previous verse was addressed in the plural. These words now are in the singular. They are directly leveled at Korah, and only at Korah. It is he who is standing there, and it is he who is the instigator of the rebellion. And so Moses reminds him that he is rebelling not against him, but against the Lord. He brought Korah near when He brought his tribe of Levi near.

Thus, Moses is exposing the contradiction in Korah's thinking. He had said *rav lakem* to Moses and Aaron, as if he was looking out for everyone in a universal priesthood. But rather, he was looking out for himself in possessing the station of high priest. The Lord who granted Aaron his position is the same Lord who also gave the Levites their position. If Korah wanted more, it could only mean that Korah wanted to be high priest. But, to usurp the priesthood of Aaron is to usurp the Lord who gave the priesthood to Aaron...

^{10 (con't)} And are you seeking the priesthood also?

Moses perfectly understood what was going on. There were bitter people who were joined together to refashion the structure of the camp contrary to the Lord's design. Reuben would demand the position of the firstborn, Korah would demand the office of high priest, and so on. The power struggles would continue until no remnant of what the Lord had designed was left. It is almost a microcosm of the world at large. Deuteronomy 32:8 says –

“When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations,
When He separated the sons of Adam,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the children of Israel.”

It is the Lord who has ordained the place and station of all nations, but the people of the world, in this very day in which we live, are uniting against the Lord to undo what the Lord has carefully arranged. With fewer exceptions each day, there is an attempt to usurp the Lord's designs now in the same manner that Korah had tried to usurp them in the wilderness.

¹¹ Therefore you and all your company *are* gathered together against the Lord.

Moses now makes explicit what he has stated implicitly all along. Still speaking only to Korah as the representative of those gathered together, he tells him that it is the Lord, not him, who they are challenging. Therefore...

¹¹ (con') **And what *is* Aaron that you complain against him?"**

It was the Lord, in Exodus 28:1, who called for Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. The people had made the garments, the ordination had taken place, and the duties were being conducted before the Lord. And all of it was at the Lord's direction. Aaron did not ask for the job, and he lost his two oldest sons because of the calling along the way. To complain against Aaron was a wholly misdirected complaint.

Bring your censers tomorrow with fire and incense

Prepare to meet your God as you do

He will reveal to you His purposes and intents

Be prepared is what I am instructing you

Stand before Him and see whom He chooses

But before you come, you might first check with His word

The one whom He rejects, that soul really loses

*You are dealing with the Holy One, Yehovah the Lord
Think on your actions and walk humbly before your God
He will only put up with so much from you
The law is written, and it will reveal you as a fraud
Be careful before Him, this is what I would ask you to do*

III. The Reuben Faction (verses 12-16)

¹² And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, “We will not come up!

Korah was the main instigator of this rebellion, but his rebellion was self-centered on obtaining the priesthood. A second faction, that of the Reubenites, had its own agenda. With the priesthood secure through Korah, Dathan and Abiram could reclaim for Reuben the status as the tribe of the firstborn and gain a kingship over the people.

Moses had grasped the intention of this coalition. With the matter of the priesthood set to be decided upon in the morning, he now directs his attention to this second issue by calling them to come. Their answer... “We will not come up.” It is understood in the Bible that the sanctuary is the center of the people, and thus it is symbolically elevated. It is the place of judgment.

The same is true with Jerusalem. To travel to Jerusalem, from any point on the compass, and from any elevation, one still is said to travel up. Dathan and Abiram understand this, and thus implicitly slap both Moses and the Lord in the face with their refusal. They then go further in their words against both of them...

¹³ *Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness,*

The words of these men are more than delusional. They had personally been in Egypt. They had suffered at the hands of the Egyptians, and they had seen the Lord, through Moses, defeat them. They willingly participated in the Passover, they willingly departed in the Exodus, and they willingly passed through the Red Sea. They further had vowed themselves to the Lord's authority twice. First at the giving of the Ten Commandments, and then again after the incident of the golden calf.

It was they, not Moses who had peevishly refused to enter Canaan, and it was the Lord who determined that they would die in the wilderness. Their accusations are wickedly directed at the Lord, but yet they are too cowardly to admit it, and so they blame the Lord's messenger. And finally, this is the only incidence in the Bible where Egypt is called "a land flowing with milk and honey."

It is a description the Lord gave concerning Canaan, and it is a description borne out by the twelve spies who went there, but they have rejected His grant, and have completely turned their hearts back to what pictures a life of sin, perversely and ironically calling *it* the land of milk and honey. That can only lead to one outcome for them, because – after all – the wages of sin is death. They have said that Moses brought them out to kill them in the wilderness. The Lord hears, and the Lord will act. Their words are as if a spoken prophecy of their certain demise. But they go on...

¹³ (con't) *that you should keep acting like a prince over us?*

Here is a new word, *sarar*. It is a verb meaning to rule like a lord or a prince. They say *ki tistarar alenu gam histarar*. They repeat the word and add in the conjunction "also" to intensify what they are saying. Literally, they say, "That you keep acting like a prince over us – also – acting as a prince." But it is not

Moses who asked for the job, nor is it Moses who leads. Rather, it is the Lord who selected Moses, and it is the Lord who directs Moses who then responds to the word of the Lord. They know this, and their challenge is a purposeful attack against Him.

¹⁴ Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards.

No! It wasn't that he or the Lord failed to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey. Rather, it was that they *refused* to go in and receive what the Lord had offered. *They* stood at the door to their promised inheritance, and *they* willingly closed it and turned away from it. To blame Moses for this is to say that he alone should have gone in, subdued the land, and then rolled out a red carpet for Israel to walk on instead of over the clods of blood and sweat that had poured from his body as he prepared for them what they would not receive.

One can see the Jews' rejection of Christ's offer in this. His sweat and blood did mingle with the dirt of that same land in order for them to receive paradise, but they closed that door as well, and they walked away from it. Moses is being accused of not doing for them what Jesus actually did. And yet, even being offered by Christ what they asked for here, they rejected it.

¹⁴ (con't) Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

The words are a metaphor as if he had cast dust into their eyes, or bored their eyes out, in order to deceive them. And once they were deceived, he would continue to lead them expecting blind obedience and acceptance of whatever he demanded. With this, they again state their refusal to come up to the place of judgment. They have rejected Moses, and thus they have rejected the Lord who is the authority for Moses' judgment.

¹⁵ Then Moses was very angry, and said to the Lord, “Do not respect their offering.

Moses is probably looking all the way back to Cain and Abel here. The word he uses is *minkhah*, a tribute or a gift offering. In Genesis 4, it is said that the Lord respected Abel’s *minkhah*, but he did not respect Cain’s. Moses is equating these two men to Cain and saying, “Treat them like Cain. They are accursed.” And then he explains why...

***¹⁵ (fin) I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them.”**

The donkey is a beast of burden. Not only did he not ever burden these men, he didn’t even give their lowly donkey any burden by taking it from them for himself. If he needed to carry a load, he used his own donkey, or he carried it himself. He never required a thing from them, nor did he in any way harm them. If he were a tyrannical ruler, as they accuse him, he could have weighed them down with any great load he chose, just as Pharaoh did to them before they were freed. But Moses never burdened or harmed these men, nor anyone else. Because of this, it is his desire that they not receive the Lord’s favor in their offering, and surely no mercy in their judgment. Of this verse, John Lange says, “...they wished to set up a priesthood and a sacrificial system of their own; and God never has blessed, and never can bless, any scheme of salvation which is not of his own appointment. Man is ever supposing that he can mend his Maker's work, or that he can make one of his own that will do in its place.”

These people had rejected Moses and Aaron, and thus they rejected the One who appointed them for their duties. They assumed that they could simply appoint themselves in their place and the Lord would accept that. But they failed to consider the nature of God and the nature of their own fallen state before God.

Korah means “baldy.” Hair, as we have seen numerous times already, signifies awareness. Korah is lacking awareness in numerous ways, thus fitting his name perfectly. He thinks that he can march into the presence of the Lord and work his own way back to paradise, but his stupidity and lack of awareness will only lead to his own ruin.

The world looks to God and has devised a thousand times a thousand ways of mending their relationship with Him, but it doesn't work that way. We cannot initiate what belongs to the Lord alone. We can either accept His plan and walk on His path, or we are cut off from any hope of remedy to our state.

God has initiated the plan, He has sent His Son, and Christ has done the work. There is nothing that can be added to that, and there is nothing that can be taken from it. It is an all or nothing deal for mankind. And each man must make his own choice to receive it or reject it. I would hope and pray that you would be wise enough to consider this, and then do what is right. Accept His offer, trust in His plan, and come to Christ. These ancient pictures are given for exactly that reason. The sad state of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram lies ahead for any who fail to follow the instruction manual as it has been written.

Closing Verse: “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’” 2 Timothy 2:19

Next Week: Numbers 16:16:35 *The way he's checking out, he won't even need an undertaker...* (Korah Meets His Maker) (31st Numbers Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. It may seem at times as if you are lost in a desert, wandering aimlessly. But the Lord is there, carefully leading you to the Land

of Promise. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

Set up for a Fall

Now Korah the son of Izhar
The son of Kohath, the son of Levi, in the wilderness is when
With Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab
And On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men
And they rose up before Moses
With some of the children of Israel, who were having a meltdown
Two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation
Representatives of the congregation, men of renown

They gathered together against Moses and Aaron
And said to them, most assuredly
“You take too much upon yourselves
For all the congregation is holy
Every one of them, and the Lord is among them
Won’t you please hear my word?
Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly
Yes, the assembly of the Lord?”

So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face
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 cause him to come near to Him

-----So Moses was to Korah relaying

That one whom He chooses, and not by just a whim

He will cause to come near to Him

Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company

Put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow

-----and here is why

And it shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one

You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!”

Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi:

Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel

Has separated you from the congregation of Israel

To bring you near to Himself as well

To do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord

And to stand before the congregation to serve them too

And that He has brought you near to Himself

You and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you

And are you seeking the priesthood also?

Therefore you and all your company

Are gathered together against the Lord

And what is Aaron that you complain against him? Kindly tell me

And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram
The sons of Eliab, but they said
“We will not come up!
We will stay out here instead
Is it a small thing that you have brought us up
Out of a land flowing with milk and honey
To kill us in the wilderness
That you should keep acting like a prince over us?
-----none of us think this is funny

Moreover you have not brought us into a land
Flowing with milk and honey; we haven't seen a cup
Nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards
Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!”
Then Moses was very angry, and said to the Lord
“Do not respect their offering, please hear me
I have not taken one donkey from them
Nor have I hurt one of them, as all can plainly see

Lord God, we are even now in a wilderness
And we are wanting to be led by You
Without You to direct, our lives would be a mess
And so be our guide, O God; You who are faithful and true
We long for the water in this barren land
May it flow forth from the Rock, our souls to satisfy
Give us this refreshing, spiritual hand

And may we take it, and to our lives daily it apply
And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to you for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...