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The Rebellion of Korah

16: 1-3

The rebellion of Korah DIG: What were the specific complaints of Korah and the Reubenites? How did they make their power play sound “spiritual?” How might such revolts against their leaders undermine the Israelites ability to survive the wilderness wanderings? How does this help to explain the severity of God’s punishment? Was it just? Why or why not?

REFLECT: What do these verses teach us about respecting those that ADONAI has put over us? Have you ever been guilty of grumbling or complaining about your spiritual leaders? Have you ever felt jealous about the ministry God has given someone else? Are you content with the role that YHVH has given you? What is your spiritual gift and how are you using it?

Parashah 38: Korah (Korah) 16:1 to 18:32

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, [to see link click Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People are Korah, Dathan, Abiram, Moshe, 250 leaders of Isra’el, Aaron, Eleazar, and the Levites.

The Scene is near the entrance to the Tabernacle, the last location mentioned, driven to Hormah.

The Main Events include Korah’s rebellion, the ground opening up to swallow the rebels and their households, 250 more lay followers with censers consumed by fire, Eleazar hammering bronze censers into the altar covering as a memorial, more complaints and a plague, 12 rods collected, Aaron’s rod buds as a sign against the rebels, Levites given for help in Tabernacle service while common Israelites are forbidden to enter and approach ADONAI, tithes and offerings first dedicated to the LORD, the rest used to support the priests.

In this anticipatory passage ([to see link click Ac](#) - **Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Anticipatory Passages**) the introduction of **the chief villain** and **the hero**

of Isra'el's rebellions in the wilderness, **Korah (Chapter 16)** and **Phinehas (Chapter 25)**, has been anticipated by the genealogy in **Exodus** (see the commentary on **Exodus Bh - These Were the Heads of the Families of Moses and Aaron**), which purposefully ends with these two names.³⁰¹

The rebellion continued to spread: From the Levites, to the lay leaders, to all the people.



A few months after **Moses** had announced that **they** would not be entering the Promised Land after all, there was **a rebellion. Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and 250 influential men** rose up **against Moshe**. It was not really surprising. **Moses'** plan of wandering around in the wilderness until **the Exodus generation** had all died was probably not too popular. It was a bit of a hard sell. Furthermore, **Korah** and **his rebels** had begun to question the legitimacy of **Moshe's** prophetic office. **He** claimed that **he** heard directly from **YHVH**, but who could say that it was true? How were **they** even to know that **he** was really sent by **God**? Furthermore, it seemed a little suspicious that, out of all the people in **Isra'el**, **the person** chosen to be **the high priest** just happened to be **Moses' big brother!** Doubt and discontent turned to **contempt** and **rebellion**.³⁰²

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath (see [At - The Clan of Kohath](#)), **the son of Levi**, and the first cousin of **Moses**, **along with Dathan and Aviram, descendants of Reuben**, conspired together and **rebelled against Moshe** (see the commentary on [Jude Ag - They Have Taken the Way of Cain, Rushed into Balaam's Error, and have](#)

been Destroyed by Korah's Rebellion). The **Kohathites** and the **Reubenites** were neighbors in the camp (see **Am - The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el**) and could have easily communicated with each other. Perhaps the **Reubenites** could not come to grips with the fact that **they** had lost **their** position as the firstborn (see the commentary on **Genesis Le - Reuben, You are My Firstborn, Turbulent as the Waters, You Will No Longer Excel**). **Reuben** was the eldest, and **his descendants** thought that **they** should have been camped on the honored east side, facing the entrance of the **Tabernacle**, instead of Judah. This is probably why **they** kept this bitterness in **their** hearts.

Korah, Dathan and Aviram were joined by another **250 laymen**. These were not rogues; however, **they** were **leaders of the community, key members of the council, men of reputation (16:1-2b)**. Thus, the text draws considerable attention to the fact that this **rebellion** was not carried out by rude, brazen ruffians but, credible **leaders**, esteemed **men** of rank. **Their** dissatisfaction with the privilege **they** had received by **God's** grace made **their rebellion** extremely tragic. **They** wanted more . . . and this intimidating mob brought **their** venomous accusations to **Moshe** in an attempt to discredit **him**.

Aaron was under attack as well because **Korah** wanted to be able to function as a **priest**. Since **Korah** was a first cousin to **Moses** and **Aaron**, **he** was jealous that **he** was only a **Levite**. Not only that, but **Moses** had appointed **Elizaphan, a Levite, son of Uzziel**, another first cousin, **as leader of the house of the priestly Kohathites (3:30)**. This must have driven **Korah** crazy. Why hadn't **Moshe** appointed **him**! So, **Korah** and **his conspirators** found all kinds of reasons to **rebel**. It seems for years **they** allowed this resentment to build up.

In addition, the nation was under the sentence of **God's** judgment, and these **men** knew that **they** were a part of **the doomed community**. Perhaps **the rebels** thought that by a forced change of guard **they** might even reverse the fortunes of **the people**. **They assembled themselves** (suggesting a well-thought-out conspiracy) **against Moshe and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! After all, the entire community is holy, every one of them, and ADONAI is among them.** Indeed, ever since **Exodus 40:34-38** the **Sh'khinah glory** was **among the people**. Nevertheless, **they** asked, "**So why do you lift yourselves up above ADONAI's assembly**" (16:3)? **He** was probably basing **his** claim on **Exodus 19:6** where it says: **You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. But that meant that **Isra'el** was a nation that was to be set apart, not that everyone was supposed to be a **priest**. Therefore, **they** were drawing the wrong conclusions. Just because **the Sh'khinah glory** was **among the people**, and just because **the nation** was **holy**, it didn't negate the fact that **ADONAI** had ordained a **priesthood**

(see the commentary on [Leviticus Av - The Ordination Ceremony of the Priesthood](#)).

So, this was not just a momentary, casual play of a motley crew. **They** had not just come up to **Moses** and **Aaron**, but **against them**; the preposition **against** is significant.³⁰³ The precise cause for this **rebellion** is not at all clear within the story of **Numbers 16** itself. Presumably, the mediation of the mitzvot in **Numbers 15** through **Moshe (15:1, 17, 22-23)**, and the emphasis on the role of **Aaron** as **high priest** in receiving sacrifices and making atonement (**15:25, 28, and 33**) provided the immediate context for inciting the revolt.³⁰⁴

When **Korah** and **his cohorts** said that **the entire nation** was **holy**, **they** emphasized the word **entirely**. **They** also insisted that **the LORD** was in the midst of **the entire community**, not just residing in the privacy of **the Tabernacle**. **Their** claims bore truth, but it was distorted. **The entire nation** was, indeed, **holy**, but the claims of **Korah and company** ignored the sovereign will of **YHVH**. **They** seemed to be arguing for a democratization of divine privilege. But in reality, **they** only wanted a shift in power . . . to **themselves**.

The pattern of leadership that **ADONAI** had established in **Isra'el** was not an even-handed, ideal democracy. **His** pattern was, and is, a theocracy - rule by **God** - mediated through a divinely sanctioned regent. In the Dispensation of Torah (see the commentary on [Exodus Da - The Dispensation of the Torah](#)) that was **Moshe**, and in the Dispensation of Grace (see the commentary on [Hebrews Bp - The Dispensation of Grace](#)) that person is **Yeshua Messiah**. Yes, **the leaders** had more privilege than the common people, and **Moses and Aaron** were the most privileged and had the greatest responsibilities. A prudent response of a privileged person is gratitude to **Ha'Shem** and loyal service to **His** praise. Only a fool would attack the structure of **God's** rule based on the mistaken notion of democracy. And fools **the rebels** became.³⁰⁵

Whether it's the ancient camp of **Isra'el** or a modern city, no society can function without subordination (which does not imply inferiority). Somebody has to be in charge. Parents have authority in the home, teachers in the classroom, managers in the factory or office, and civil servants in the city or nation (see the commentary on [Romans De - Respecting Civil Authority](#)). When this kind of order breaks down, then society is in serious trouble. **God**, in **His** sovereignty, had chosen **Moses** to be the leader of the nation and **Aaron** to be **the high priest**, and this rebellion against the will of **God** and brought serious division to the camp.

The selfish desire for greatness and authority is a common theme in Scripture, whether it's **Korah's** opposing **Moshe** and **Aaron**, **Absalom** defying **his father** (see the commentary on

the Life of David Do - Absalom's Conspiracy), **Adonijah** claiming **David's crown** for **himself** (see the commentary on **the Life of Solomon Ak - King Me!**), or **the apostles** arguing over which of **them** was **the greatest** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gg - The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven**). And yet the most important place in the Church is the place of **God's** choice, the place **He** prepared for us to fill. The important thing isn't status, but faithfulness, doing the work that **ADONAI** wants us to do. Every member of **the Body of Messiah**, has a spiritual gift to be used for serving others, and therefore every member is important to **God** and to the Church (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Cr - Unified and Diversified**).³⁰⁶

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that what is most wonderful, most awesome, most fantastic is a relationship with you! Many things seem good - but they last only for a moment in time. Ruling power is over so soon (**First Kings 15:25, 16:8, 25**). The applause and cheers of the crowd quickly ends (**Matthew 21:9 and 27:20-23**). Fame disappears like smoke. Money and fortunes fade away (**Matthew 19:21**). But, of everlasting value is a lifetime of loving and following **You**! What a joy to receive **You** as **Lord** and **Savior** (**Romans 10:9-10**) and so become **Your child**. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)**. **You** are perfect, wise and loving in all that **You** do! Even when **You** discipline, it is done from a heart of love to bring **Your** wayward **child** back to **You** for greater joy! **Because ADONAI disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He accepts (Hebrews 12:6)**. Thank **You** that when I focus on how wonderful **You** are, the things of this world lose value and all that is important to me is to please **You** and offer back to **You** a life of love. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*