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The Rebellion of Dathan and Abiram

16: 12-17

The rebellion of Dathan and Abiram DIG: How was the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram different in nature from that of Korah? Describe the response from Dathan and Abiram to Moshe's pleas. What were they accusing Moshe of doing? How does Moses plead his case before ADONAI?

REFLECT: Here we have another case of rebellion. What attitudes about ADONAI and yourself do you see in these complaints? When are you most likely to become dissatisfied with your rabbi or pastor? How do you handle it? Ask the Lord to give you the ability to honor those He has placed over you.

Moshe had six responses to the attack by Korah and his followers.



The scene now switches to **Dathan and Abiram**, apparently grumbling in **their** tents. After formally declaring the test (**to see link click Cp - The Response of Moshe**), **Moses** then called on **them** to reason with **him** and talk things out. It was in this appeal that **Dathan and Abiram** were afforded the opportunity to vent **their** frustration about the current situation. Of course this was impossible, because **he** was trying to reason with **those** who were completely bent on impeaching **him**.³¹⁵

The fourth response was sent to Dathan and Abiram: Korah's jealousy and contempt found several ready sympathizers, particularly among **the tribe of Reuben**. Then Moshe sent to summon Dathan and Abiram. But they replied, "We won't come up," clearly implying, "We will no longer obey your orders" – an open break with **Moses'** authority (16:12)! **The Reubenites'** rebellion centered on the divine declaration that **the Exodus generation** would wander for forty years and **die in the wilderness**. But, maybe there was more to it. Perhaps, remembering the fate of **Aaron's sons** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Bh - The Death of Nadab and Abihu**), they were uneasy about **Korah's** foolhardy bid for **the priesthood** (see **Co - The Rebellion of Korah**). Knowing the illegitimacy of the claim, they nevertheless wished to support him at a distance.³¹⁵ They objected: **Is it such a small thing, bringing us up from the land of Egypt, supposedly flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness** (see **Bz - Faith and Obedience**), **that now you assume to yourself the role of dictator over us** (16:13)? **Joseph's brothers**, led by **Reuben**, who said the same thing to him, "Do you intend to rule over us" (Genesis 37:8a).

This was a foreshadowing of **the Messiah**, where, unwittingly, the Jewish religious leaders of **His** day confessed: **We don't want this man to rule over us** (Luke 19:14). Paul sums up **Numbers 16** for us quite nicely when he says: **Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by ADONAI. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves** (Romans 13:1-2). This is the story of **Korah**. **The Ruach Ha'Kodesh** even goes out of **His** way even to mention names so that we can be warned. In **Third John 3:9**, for example, **the apostle** says: **I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. Dathan and Abiram** are merely a foreshadowing of the final rebellion of the antichrist, which **Paul** warns us about, declaring: **He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in the Tribulation Temple** (see the commentary on **Revelation Bx - The Tribulation Temple**), **proclaiming himself to be God** (Second Thess 2:4). **Samuel** was right when he said that **rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft**, it only accomplishes **the devil's** schemes; it only destroys, it divides (**First Sam 15:23a**).³¹⁶

Then, by some strange transformation in the minds of **Dathan and Abiram**, the land of **Egypt** had changed from a prison to a paradise, and **Moses** was seen as some sort of dunce who had been leading **the Israelites** in the wrong direction.³¹⁷ **The Reubenites** chided: **You haven't at all brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, and you**

haven't put us in possession of fields and vineyards. The irony is, of course, **the two** were probably among **those** who counseled against taking **the Promised Land** at **Kadesh-barnea** (see [Bv](#) - **The Sin of Kadesh-barnea**). Next, **they** accused **Moshe** of **blinding the people** with deceit. **Do you think you can gouge out these men's eyes and blind them** so **they** can't see that **you** are a fraud? Taking no responsibility for **their** own failure to enter the Promised Land, **they** stomped **their** stubborn feet to the ground and declared: No! **We won't come up (16:14)!** Although **their** rebellion was of a different nature than **Korah's**, nevertheless it came from the same source, **they** didn't believe in the authority of **Moses**.³¹⁸

Fifthly, Moses became angry and spoke to God in his own defense against his detractors: That did it for **Moshe**. At first **he** had **humbled himself (16:4)**, but this time, totally frustrated with trying to communicate rationally with **his** detractors, **He** became **very angry**. Seeing that no argument would convince **the rebels**, **their** conscience being seared like a hot iron, and being filled with a holy zealousness for **God (Psalm 109)**, **Moses said to ADONAI, "Don't accept their grain offering** (see [Leviticus Aj](#) - **The Grain Offerings**). In addition to the regular daily **burnt offering** at 9am and 3pm, an independent **grain offering** was also given twice a day. **I haven't taken one donkey from them, I've done nothing wrong to any of them" (16:15).**³¹⁹

Moses' sixth response was to turn back to Korah and repeat the instructions for the test: These verses round off the first part of the story. The procedure for the test is repeated with a few more details than in **16:6-7a**. The test was to determine which men **God** would accept as **His priests** within **His Tabernacle**.³²⁰ **Moshe said to Korah, "You and your group, be there before YHVH tomorrow - you, they and Aaron. Each of you take his bronze censer and put incense in it; every one of you, bring before ADONAI his censer, 250 bronze censers, you too, and Aaron - each one should have his own censer" (16:16-17).** Notice that **Moshe** is still giving **the rebels** a chance to repent right up to the last second. **He** didn't tell **the rebels** to put fire in **their censers**, because if **they** did, it would be **strange fire**, and would have sealed **their** fate.

*Dear Great Loving and Forgiving Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that though **You** are perfect and holy, **You** are also loving and merciful. **You** hate sin and cannot tolerate even the smallest sin, yet **You** so graciously became our sin bearer when **Your Son** died on the cross and then rose in victory three days later! Thank **You** that **You** offer forgiveness when there is honest repentance. **You see the heart, "For man looks at the outward appearance, but ADONAI looks into the hear" (First Samuel 16:7c). For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and able to judge the***

*thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12a, c), the One who searches minds and hearts (Revelation 2:23). You chose David, saying: I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do My will (Acts 13:22). Though David sinned greatly, committing adultery and murder, **his** repentance in **Psalms 51** and **32** was also great in repentance where **he** humbly turned from **his** sin asking for **Your** cleansing and a clean heart. **David** showed that a right relationship with **You** was **his** top priority (**Psalms 52:12**). In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*