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The Response of God

16: 16-40

The response of God DIG: How justified was Ha'Shem's death sentence to the Exodus generation? Was it too sweeping? They could not all have been as rebellious as it seemed. Or were they? Why did Korah's sons survive when the others did not?

REFLECT: How can you protect yourself from evil? What do you look at? Do you take the "second look?" What do you hear? What do you touch? In what ways are you separate and holy from the world? Who is the Korah in your life? How can you move away from him?

**The ego of Moses wasn't the only thing at stake here;
There was also the vindication of God's work, His Name, and His glory.**

The grievances of both parties having been outlined in [Co](#) - **The Rebellion of Korah** and [Cq](#) - **The Rebellion of Dathan and Abiram**, the story now relates how **they** were both judged in manners appropriate to **their** complaints. **The Korahite** faction, claiming the right of **the priesthood**, were allowed to test **their** calling by offering **incense**, and **their** unholiness was confirmed by **fire** from **ADONAI** consuming **them**. **The Reubenites**, who accused **Moses** of bringing **them** to **die in the wilderness**, do indeed meet **their** end there, just as the faithless spies did before them (**14:36-38**). Therefore, as in the spy story (**to see link click [By](#) - The Sin of Kadesh-barnea**), dramatic irony and avenging justice can be seen.³²¹

Separate yourselves (16:18-22): So, each of the 250 men took his bronze censor and put fire in it. When **they put fire in their censors**, it sealed **their** fate because it was **strange fire** (see the commentary on [Leviticus Bh](#) - **The Death of Nadab and Abihu**). Then **they laid incense on it and stood at the entrance to the Tabernacle with Moshe and Aaron**. Korah assembled the leaders of the community, key members of the council, men of repute (16:1-2b) who were against them. Then suddenly, **the Sh'khinah glory** (see the commentary on [Isaiah Ju](#) - **The Glory of the LORD Rises Upon You**) appeared to the whole assembly (16:19). Were all the people of Isra'el really innocent? No. The solution seems to be that clearly **the leaders** held the greatest

guilt for the rebellion, and **the people** were relatively less guilty in **their** intentions at this point. **The whole assembly's** moment of rebellion will come soon (see [Cs - The Rebellion of All the People](#)).³²²

ADONAI said to Moshe and Aaron, “Separate yourselves from this assembly; I’m going to destroy them at once!” But Moses and Aaron didn’t move. They fell on their faces and said: Oh God (Hebrew: *El*, singular), God (Hebrew: *Elohim*, plural) of the breath of all humankind, emphasizing that YHVH is the Creator and the Sovereign, and therefore controls all life; if one person sins, are you going to be angry with the entire assembly! This is the same argument that Abraham brought before YHVH. On behalf of Lot, Abraham said: Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked (see the commentary on [Genesis Ew - Abraham Intercedes](#))? The answer is no; of course it is no. The soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezeki’el 18:20a).

Judgment is imminent (16:23-27): ADONAI answered Moshe, “Tell the assembly to move away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.” Moshe got up and went to Dathan and Abiram because they would not come to Moshe when they were summoned (16:12), and the leaders of Isra’el followed him, siding with Moses, serving as witnesses. There he said to the assembly, “Leave the tents of these wicked men! Actually, the word “tents” in Hebrew is singular. It was one dwelling, one tent, one teaching, and one rebellion for all of them. Don’t touch anything that belongs to them (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Ag - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh](#)), or you may be swept away in all their sins.” Holiness is not contagious, but evil is. John echoes this principle, saying: If anyone comes to you and does not bring the teaching that Yeshua Messiah is coming in the flesh, do not take him into your house or welcome him (see the commentary on [Hebrews Ci - If We Deliberately Keep on Sinning, No Sacrifice for Sins is Left](#)). Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work (Second John 7 and 10-11). So, they moved away from all around the area where Korah, Dathan and Abiram lived (16:23-27a).

For us today, moving away from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram means moving away from the world. John writes to us, telling us what we shouldn’t do: Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful mankind, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world (First John 2:15-16). Paul, however, tells us what we should do: Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about

such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).³²³

Then Korah, Dathan, and Abiram came out and stood at the entrance to their tents with their wives, sons and little ones (16:27b). So, the whole family was included in the judgment. There was no mercy, no pleading, no help. **The children, wives, and even toddlers** died with **their** wicked **fathers**. Whole families were wiped out. This judgment was immediate, catastrophic, horrible, and complete. Yet there is something in it that is also satisfying: something of the honor of **the LORD** and the servants **He** had named, of the purity of the camp, and, in a sense, of poetic justice.³²⁴ This is based on the principle in the TaNaKh of family solidarity and collective punishment by **God (Exodus 20:5-6, 34:6-7, and Joshua 7:16-26)**. This type of collective punishment happens only if **Ha'Shem** does the punishing. This does not apply if the punishment is by mankind (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ep - Personal Responsibility**).³²⁵

The oath of God (16:28-30): Moshe said, "Here is how you will know that ADONAI has sent me to do all these things (the Levitical and Aaronic appointments) and that I haven't done them out of my own ambition: if these men die a natural death like other people, only sharing the fate common to all humanity, then ADONAI has not sent me. But if ADONAI does something new (Hebrew: *if He creates and creation*, meaning *it will be obvious to everyone that it is something only God can do*) - if the ground opens up and swallows them with everything they own, and they go down alive to Sh'ol - then you will understand that these men have had contempt for ADONAI."

Sh'ol in the TaNaKh is the underworld for both **the wicked** and **the righteous** in the center of the earth (**Isaiah 14:9-11**). **The wicked** went to the place of **torment**, and **the righteous of the TaNaKh** went to **Abraham's side** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Hx - The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**). **The righteous** stayed there until **Yeshua** had paid for **their** sins on the cross. Then, while **His** body lay in the tomb, **Messiah** descended into **Sh'ol** and **preached to the wicked spirits in prison (First Peter 3:18)**. After declaring victory over **them**, **the Lord of Life** liberated the godly captives, leading **them** to heaven when **He ascended on high (Ephesians 4:8)**. Among those who went with **Him** were Adam, Eve, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah and all **the righteous of the TaNaKh** before the cross, including those mentioned in the hall of faith in the book of **Hebrews** (see my commentary on **Hebrews Cl - The Hall of Faith**).



The destruction (16:31-35): The moment Moses finished speaking, the ground under them split apart - the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the households of Dathan and Abiram, all the people who had sided with Korah, and everything they owned. So they, and everything they owned, went down alive into Sh'ol. The earth closed over them and their existence in the community ceased. This could not be explained as a normal earthquake. And not only is there no physical evidence left at this site, but there was no name given to this site as were other places of judgment. The whole camp heard the gruesome sound of **their shrieking voices** as they plummeted into the mouth of **the earth**. **All Isra'el around them fled at the sound of the death cry of those** who fell into the chasm alive, **shouting, "The earth might swallow us too!"** Meanwhile, back at the Tabernacle, **fire came out from ADONAI and destroyed the 250 men who had offered the incense**, proving that YHVH rejected them from the **priesthood**.³²⁶

It is important that we know that **the sons of Korah** survived **their father's** folly (26:11). Evidently, **they** had nothing to do with **their father's** foolishness. **They** went on to **father** some impressive offspring. **They** survived as the family of **the Korahites (26:58)** and occupied an important place in the service of the Temple under David and Solomon by becoming the **Korahite** singers in the Temple (**First Chronicles 6:31-38**) and **they** were responsible for writing several of our **psalms (Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85, and 87-88)**. So by the grace of **ADONAI**, **the sons of Korah** did not perish in this judgment. And according to **First Chronicles 6:27-28**, the prophet **Samuel** actually descended from **Korah**. How ironic that **Samuel** actually did enter the functions of **the priesthood**. The very desire that had been the undoing of **his** forbearer was given to **Samuel**.³²⁷

The bronze censers (16:36-40): The bronze censers of the 250 leaders then became a holy offering to God at the cost of their lives. They had become a burnt offering to the LORD. The smell of their incense would not be able to cover that of their stinking, charred remains. Can you imagine the scene? True priests were picking among the bodies, charred flesh, twisted parts, stench, smoke, and smoldering coles. ADONAI said to Moses, "Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the high priest, to remove the censers from the charred remains and scatter the fiery coals some distance away, for the censers are holy - the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives. They were to make a count. There were 250 censers and not one of them was lost. Each one was recorded, each one cleansed, because each one was holy. Then the fiery coles were to be scattered some distance away from the camp. It was a strange fire, not a holy fire. It was a fire of judgment.

Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the bronze altar, for they were presented before ADONAI and have become holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites." So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers brought by those who had been burned to death, and he had them hammered out to overlay the bronze altar, as ADONAI directed him through Moses. For generations to come, the sight of the fire consuming the sacrifices upon the bronze altar would ever serve to remind both the Levites and Israelites that no one except a descendant of Aaron should come to burn incense before the LORD, or he would become like Korah and his followers. The ego of Moses wasn't the only thing at stake here, but the vindication of God's work, His Name, and His glory.

As we think about the notion of the holy things, we recognize that things are made holy in the Bible not because people are holy, but because things are presented to YHVH, who is holy. The censers had been touched by the fire of God, and therefore, were holy, despite the wickedness of the men holding them. Therefore, even with the death of the false priests, the holy censers had to be treated as holy things. This is amazing! Korah and his followers were wicked and had to be destroyed; but the bronze censers were holy and needed to be preserved! From that time on, the sheets of bronze which overlaid the bronze altar would be a memorial of the utter folly of the counterfeit priest of the most holy God. Their families would know. Their neighbors would remember. Every time they looked at the bronze altar or thought of it again, they would be forced to remember the folly of Korah's rebellion.

A mark of Eleazar's faith was that he did exactly what Moshe commanded him to do. He was thus a strong contrast to Korah and his allies. Just as the Name of God is a memorial

to **His** grace (**Exodus 3:15**), and as the stones in the Jordan River would later make a memorial for **Isra'el** on their entry into the Promised Land (**Joshua 4:7**), so those **censers** and the resulting **sheets overlaying the bronze altar** were a memorial to **God's** wrath and also a witness to **His** holiness. After the smoke cleared, it was certain that **Eleazar** would follow **his father, Aaron the priest . . . not Korah.**³²⁸

*Dear Loving and Holy Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You** are always full of love, perfectly holy and wonderfully wise. Following **Your** ways is what brings the greatest joy into our lives. We desire to live our lives following **Your** ways as carefully as **Eleazar** did, and not being full of pride as **Korah, Dathan and Abiram** were. We know that as we think often of **Your** Great Qualities, that will help us to follow **You** closely. Please remind us of **Your** greatness while we sleep that we may praise **You** even in the night! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*