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The Rebellion of All the People

16: 41-50

The rebellion of all the people DIG: What further charge was brought against Moses and Aaron? How many times did the Sh'khinah glory appear; how many times did Moses and Aaron intercede on the nations' behalf? How is Messiah a Priest of the higher order of Melchizedek? How did God validate Aaron as the high priest during the plague?

REFLECT: Aaron "stood between the dead and the living" to save his people. Are there people for whom you need to pray and seek God? Who are they? Take a moment to pray for someone who is currently under the judgment of God. Pray for that person to have "a moment of spiritual clarity," to see their sin for what it is, and ask for forgiveness.

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



The rebellion of the people (16:41-45 and 47b): Sin is contagious. The rebellion began by three men, spread to **250**, and then was responsible for contributing to the deaths of **14,700** others. One would think that **the people** would have had **their** bellies' full of rebellion. Nevertheless, **they** were at it again. Not waiting very long, **the next day the**

people grumbled against Moses and Aaron and said: You have killed ADONAI's people (16:41). Blinded by **their sin**, **the people** did not interpret things correctly and claimed that **Moses and Aaron killed God's people**; but it was actually **Ha'Shem** who did the **killing of Korah and his followers (to see link click Cr - The Response of God)**. The deaths of **Korah and his followers** should have brought reverent awe into the hearts of **the Israelites**, but there was **no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3:18)**. Instead of falling on their knees and crying out to **God** for forgiveness and mercy **the Israelites** were rebelling against **Moses and Aaron** just like **Korah** had done.³²⁹

When a menacing mob gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tabernacle, suddenly the cloud covered it and the Sh'khinah glory of ADONAI appeared (16:42). **God** came to the rescue. This is the third time that **the Sh'khinah glory** appeared in **Numbers**. And each time it spells trouble for those who oppose **Him, His** purpose, or **His** chosen ones. When **the whole community** gathered **stones to stone Caleb and Joshua to death, the Sh'khinah glory** appeared and protected **them (14:10-12)**; when **Korah assembled the leaders of the community, key members of the council, men of reputation** to oppose **Moses and Aaron, then suddenly the Sh'khinah glory** appeared to defend **His** chosen ones; and here, the third time we see **the Sh'khinah glory** suddenly appearing to save **Moses and Aaron** again.³³⁰

Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tabernacle (16:43). **They** did not grovel in fear. **They** were where **they** belonged - in the presence of **the LORD**. Only they were permitted to do so; all others who dared draw near would become burnt offerings. **Moses and Aaron** approached **the Tabernacle** and entered into the eerie darkness within the mysterious cloud, with lightning and darkness enveloping - they came to **God**.

ADONAI's response was exactly the same as before when **He said to Moses, "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."** Once again the whole nation is faced with total destruction if not for their intercession. **Moses and Aaron fell facedown (16:44-45),** just as **they** had done when **Korah and his allies** rebelled **(16:4)**, and just as **they** had done when **each of the 250 men took his censor and put fire in it (16:22)**. Again, as **Ha'Shem** was about to destroy **the nation, Moses and Aaron,** under unbelievable personal attack, bowed down to seek **His** mercy, to turn away **His wrath**.³³¹ But this time, it was not soon enough to stop **the plague** that had already begun. **Wrath has come out from ADONAI; the plague has started" (16:46).** **God's** holiness demanded it.

The plague (16:46-47a, and 48-50): As is the case with other disciplinary plagues sent by

Ha'Shem, this one, being supernatural, would require a supernatural cure! **Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fiery burning coals from the bronze altar and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them to appease the wrath of YHVH. Moshe told his brother to hurry.** This word communicates the rush of grace by two old men to protect **the people**, who moments before, had shouted **their** venomous hatred of **them**. Surely, in **the brothers'** actions we find **God's** mercy! **They** could have said, "Let them die!" But **their** character mirrored **His** own. **Moses** knew **the plague** had already begun before **he** had even looked. **He** could hear the shrieks of **the people** in the throes of death.

We notice that **Aaron** was told to **take fiery burning coals from the bronze altar. He** was not to use strange **fire**, but **holy fire**. **He** only used **fire** that would produce the results that **ADONAI** wanted. Earlier there were **censers** with strange **fire** used to attack **Moses and Aaron**, thus provoking **the wrath** of YHVH. But now, there was **a censer of holy fire** from **the holy altar** to protect **the people** against **Ha'Shem's wrath**.³³²

This chapter has turned on the account of **holy censers** being used by unholy **men** in mock piety. Notice how one censer in the hands of **the real priest** was more powerful than **250 censers** in the hands of counterfeit **priests (16:31-35)**. And **incense**, which brought death when offered by counterfeit **priests**, brought life when offered by **the real priest**. What poetic justice! The very implement used by their enemies to force **God's** hand to act, was then used to show **His** mercy. **So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them (16:47)**.

Aaron physically **stood between the living and the dead**, though as **high priest he** would normally avoid all possible contact with **the dead (Leviticus 21:11)**. But for the sake of the survival of the living, **he** humbled **himself** and was willing to sacrifice **his** ritual purity (see the commentary on **Leviticus Bk - Ritually Clean and Unclean Animals**) and **his** own life for the sake of **his people**. This was proof that **he** was, indeed, the chosen **high priest of God**. But there will be another affirmation in the next chapter (see **Cu - Aaron's Staff Budded**). **And the plague stopped (16:48)**. This shows **the plague** was not progressing in a haphazard way, but sweeping along from person to person.³³³

Aaron was a true intercessor. This image of a priestly intercessor has its ultimate expression in the work of **Messiah**, who as a **Priest of the higher order of Melchizedek** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bl - Yeshua the Melchizedek Priest**), sacrificed **His** own life to take upon **Himself** the sin of humanity through **His** death on the cross, for the

sake of gaining eternal life (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**) for a rebellious human race.³³⁴

But 14,700 people died before **Aaron** was able to stop **the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah**. What drama! And what a loss! Thousands died needlessly! Victims of **their** own foolishness. Why did **they** die? Because they did not obey. But at last the plague was stemmed. **Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the Tabernacle, for the plague had stopped,** a vindication of the role **ADONAI** had given to these two **men (16:49-50)**. Despite the repeated attempts by powerful people to wrestle away from them the special place in the work of **YHVH**, there **they** stood, two old **men, blessed of the LORD**.³³⁵

We learn an important spiritual principle in this story. There are many **holy men** and would-be holy men in the world. Like **the Levites**, they have their assigned place and duty. But when it comes to atonement, we had better make sure that we have **the true Priest**. This is why we must cling to **Yeshua Messiah**. **He** is the right **man** for the job. **He** is the only one qualified to **atone** for us in **the Heavenly Tabernacle** (see **Hebrews Bz - The Better Tabernacle Purified with Better Blood**). **He** is the only **One** to stave off **wrath**.³³⁶

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for our eternal intercessor, ever living high priest, who came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself . . . **Messiah was offered once to bear the sins of many. (Heb 9:26c, 28a)**. What marvelous great love that willingly endured shame and great pain (**Heb 12:2**) so that you could rescue mankind from sin's curse of death. **You** were the sinless **Lamb of God (Jn 1:29)** offering. **By His will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Messiah Yeshua once for all (Heb 10:10)**. Knowing the great cost **He** would have to pay, **You** chose the hard path so that **You** might offer **Him** for the sins of the world. **Yeshua Himself** declared: **I lay down My life, so that I may take it up again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father (John 10:17b-18)**.*

*As the **High Priest**, **You** presented the sinless offering of **Your** own body, that **Your blood** might cleanse the consciences (**Hebrews 9:14**) of those who love and follow **You** as their **Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9-10)**. Earthly High Priests die, creating the need for a new High Priest; but because **You live forever** and have conquered death by **Your rising from the dead on the third day (Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-10)**, no more sacrifices for sins need to be made. **Your High Priesthood** lasts eternally. **Indeed, every priest stands day by day serving and offering the same***

*sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But on the other hand, when this One offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God - waiting from then on, until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 10:11-13). Praise and thank you for being our great intercessor, and perfect **High Priest**. In **Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*