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Echoes Elsewhere in Numbers



The story of **Korah, Dathan, and Abiram** (to see link click [Cn](#) - [Korah's Rebellion](#)) resonates in several ways with other portions of the book of **Numbers**. Our teaching of the mitzvah in **Numbers 15** already noted several connections with **Korah's** rebellion in **Chapter 16**, such as **ADONAI speaking** only through **Moshe (15:1-21)**, the **priest making atonement for the whole community of the people of Isra'el (15:25)**, **anyone who sins defiantly (15:30)** as being the cause of **Korah's** rebellion. **Korah's** status as a **Levite** and a member of **the clan of Kohath** (see [At](#) - [The Clan of Kohath](#)) brings us back to the picture of total obedience and careful order in the arrangement of the camp (see [Am](#) - [The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el](#)) and the assigned duties surrounding **the Tabernacle** in **Numbers Chapters 2** through **4**. **The Levites** special status as the tribe closest to **the Tabernacle** should have brought joy and fulfillment to **them**, but in **Chapter 16**, **Korah** wanted the full privilege and responsibility of **the high priest (16:3 and 8-11)**. **His rebellion** continued the trouble in the holy camp which had begun in the spy story (see [By](#) - [The Sin of Kadesh-barnea](#)) of **Numbers 13** and **14**. In the spy story, **the rebels** claimed that **the land of Canaan devoured its inhabitants (13:32)**, a lie that caused **the people** to rebel against going into **the Promised Land**. Now, in **Numbers 16**, what **Isra'el** feared in Canaan became a reality in the desert as **Ha'Shem opened up the ground and swallowed Korah and his followers alive (16:31-33)**.

Rebellion over authority and jealousy have appeared earlier in **Numbers**. **Aaron himself**, along with **Miryam** had challenged **Moshe's** authority with a question quite similar to **Korah's** when they said: **Has ADONAI spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also" (12:2)?** Aaron found himself on the other side of that question when **Korah** and **his conspirators** asked: **After all, the entire community is holy, every one of them . . . So why do you lift yourselves up above ADONAI's assembly" (16:3)?** The message of Korah's rebellion is that certain functions associated with **the holy Tabernacle** and leadership of **the nation of Isra'el** should be performed only by those **leaders** and **priests** whom **ADONAI** has chosen and commissioned. Yet, those **leaders** were not perfect; **Aaron** in **his** rebellion against **Moses** is one example (see [Bu - The Rebellion of Miryam and Aaron](#)). Moreover, at times **Moshe** welcomed guidance from outside divinely chosen channels like **Hobab the Midianite (10:29-32)** and the prophesying in the camp by **Eldad and Medad (11:26-30)**.

Thus, the total witness of **Numbers** suggests that the Church ought to honor their **leaders** and respect certain divisions of ministry between lay people and ordained Messianic rabbis and pastors. But lay **leaders** also need to be open to **their** own sinfulness and to listen to other mature believers for wisdom and guidance. Problems, whether among **leaders** or followers arise when envy, self-exaltation and personal attack take over from a genuine concern for obedience to **God's** will and the well-being of the entire community.

As we return to the context of the story and development of the book of **Numbers**, the rebellion of **Korah, Dathan, Abiram, the 250 lay leaders**, and finally **the whole congregation** suggests a spreading out and extension of the spirit of rebellion among the members of **the old Exodus generation**. In spite of the interruption of the additional mitzvot in **Numbers 15** (see [Cg - A Whisper of Hope: Reassurance for Life in the Promised Land](#)), **the old Exodus generation** had continued its downward spiral into ongoing rebellion, disintegration as a community, and despising **God** and **God's** gifts of the Land, **God's** mitzvot, and **God's** chosen leaders. Are there ways by which **Aaron's** privilege as **priest** can be visually established into the minds of **the Israelites**? Does **Isra'el** need a review of the rights and responsibilities of **the priesthood** and the role of **the Levites**? These questions form the basis for the next two chapters, **Numbers 17** and **18**, in which the issue of **Aaron's** claim to **the priesthood** and the functions of **the priests** and **Levites** will be given more detailed attention. This may have helped preserve the lives of **the Exodus generation** for many years, although **their** eventual death sentence was just a matter of time, since **Ha'Shem** swore it with **an oath** (see [Cr - The Response of God: The oath of God](#)). But equally binding were **God's** eternal promises which were then given to **the wilderness generation** who grew up **in the desert** even as **their parents** were dropping



dead into **the sand (Numbers 14:31, 15:2, 18 and 41).**³³⁷