

Sunday, November 14, 2021

<u>Lesson:</u> Numbers 16:1-14; <u>**Time of Action:**</u> about 1443

B.C.; Place of Action: Desert of Paran

Golden Text: "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway" (Deuteronomy 11:1).

I. INTRODUCTION. In this week's lesson once again we see fellow Jews rebelling against Moses, Aaron and God. It appears that for some reason, the Israelites failed to learn from previous mistakes (see Numbers 12:1-15). On this occasion, a Levite named Korah along with others, by rejecting Moses' leadership were actually rejecting God Himself. These men falsely accused Moses of taking advantage of his role without considering the consequences involved in rebelling against God.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. When the twelve chosen spies returned to the Israelite camp from exploring the land, ten of the twelve men brought a report indicating that they would not be able to take the land because of giants (see Numbers 13:31-33). But two of the twelve, Joshua and Caleb, declared that Israel was "well able" to take possession of the



land (see Numbers 13:30). They also said "If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us" (see Numbers 14:8). The people believed the evil report from the other ten spies and turned against Joshua and Caleb. This led the people to call for the stoning of Joshua and Caleb (see Numbers 14:10). At this point, "the glory of the LORD appeared in the temple of the congregation" in front of all the people, and God told Moses that because the people had constantly provoked Him, He would destroy them and start all over with Moses (see Numbers 14:11-12). As he had done before, Moses interceded for the people asking the LORD to pardon them (see Numbers 14:13-19). The LORD agreed to pardon them (see Numbers 14:20), but there would still be consequences for their actions. The LORD declared that all the people who had seen His many miracles and still tested and disobeyed Him would not see the land of Canaan; their bodies would fall in the wilderness (see Numbers 14:22-29). God even declared that the Israelites would wander in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each day the spies spent exploring the land (see Numbers 14:34-37); but Joshua and Caleb, the only ones over 20 years old would enter the land (see Numbers 14:38). Then in chapter 15, God gave Israel more rules to govern themselves including offering sacrifices to the LORD, laws concerning treatment of strangers when they would finally possess the Promised Land (see Numbers 15:1-16), and what should happen to Jews who sinned either through ignorance or presumptuously or purposely (see Numbers 15:1-31). Then the LORD commanded Moses to have the people put fringes on the border of their robes covered with a blue ribbon to remind them that they belonged to the LORD, and they were to be holy and obey Him (see Numbers 15:37-41). Our lesson



comes from chapter 16.

III. KORAH'S ACCUSATION AGAINST MOSES (Numbers 16:1-3)

A. The rebellious clan comes against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16:1-3).

1. (vs. 1). Our first verse says "Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men..." Here we see the beginning of another rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Moses, the author Numbers wrote "Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men..." The description of "Korah," as "the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi" simply means that "Korah" was the grandson of "Kohath" and a descendant of "Levi" one of Jacob's twelve sons. Therefore, "Korah" was a Levite from the tribe of "Levi" from which the priests came. God had chosen "Kohath" and his descendants to care for the tabernacle including performing certain services and transporting it and its furniture (see Numbers 4:1-20) when the nation was on the move. The fact that "Korah" is mentioned first indicates that he was the ring-leader of this rebellion referred to in the book of Jude as "the gainsaying of Korah" (see Jude 1:11). "Korah" was joined by "Dathan" and "Abiram, the sons



of Eliab" and "On, the son of Peleth" who were "sons" or descendants from the tribe "of Reuben" who was Jacob's oldest son. Together, these four men conspired to involve others in their insurrection when they "took men," meaning they chose certain "men" to go along with them. The "men" they chose are identified in the next verse. For some unknown reason, "On," one of the leaders of this group is never mentioned again in this story. It may be that he was not as vocal as the other three men, or maybe he came to his senses and backed off. Since the text does not say why he's not mentioned anymore, whatever we may think would be mere speculation. Note: It's interesting that "Korah" was also Moses' first cousin, for their fathers were brothers (see Exodus 6:18-20). Yet the closeness of that relationship was not enough to keep "Korah" from being insolent and rude to Moses as we will see later. But this was not the first time Moses faced rebellion from within his family, for even his own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron turned against him earlier (see Numbers 12:1-2).

2. (vs. 2). This verse says "And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown..." The pronoun "they" refers to Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On. These four men "rose up before" or came against "Moses" to incite a rebellion against him. They did this along with "certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown." These were the men the rebels "took" or chose to



go along with them (see verse 1). The leaders of this rebellion made sure they selected "certain of the children of Israel" not just anybody. These "two hundred and fifty" men are called "princes of the assembly" which means that they were heads and leaders in Israel (see Numbers 1:16). They were also "famous in the congregation, men of renown" meaning that they were well-known community leaders and "men" of distinction. The Kohathites and the Reubenites both encamped on the same side of the tabernacle (see Numbers 2:10; 3:29) which perhaps gave "Korah" and his partners in crime the opportunity to draw the others in on their insurrection. As believers, we must be careful not to put ourselves in danger of being infected by those who have sinful desires. **Note:** It's quite possible that these "two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly" who joined the conspiracy, as heads of their families had been the ones responsible for ministering in holy things among the people before Aaron was elevated to the priesthood. So they may have already been jealous of Moses and Aaron making it easy for them to become part of the rebellion. It has always been the pride and ambition of great men and women that has led to a great deal of trouble both in churches and in government. But God, by His grace will make great men humble. Undoubtedly, the fame and "renown" which these rebels already had did not satisfy them. Although they had high positions, they appeared to want higher ones. When this happens, famous men soon became infamous (see Proverbs 11:2; *16:18)*.



B. The false accusations brought against Moses and Aaron (Revelation 16:3). This verse says "And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" Here we have the trumped up charges these rebels brought "against Moses and against Aaron." They said to them "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them." The phrase "Ye take too much upon you" means that they were accusing "Moses" and "Aaron" of exercising authority over the people that they didn't have. These rebels based their quarrel with "Moses" and "Aaron" on the priesthood that was given to Aaron and his family. In essence, they felt that was an honor that was not "Moses'" to give (see Exodus 28:1; Numbers 3:5, 10), nor was it an honor for "Aaron" to accept. So they falsely and unjustly accused both of them of taking the positions of honor they had on their own (see Hebrews 5:4). But everything that these rebels had seen God do through "Moses" was proof beyond a doubt, that both of them were called of God to their positions of leadership and authority. Then these rebels, proudly boasted about the holiness of "the congregation" of Israel, and the presence of God being "among them." They said "seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them." In other words, they were saying that just like "Moses" and "Aaron," every Israelite was "holy" and "the LORD" was present with them. Their point (which was no



point at all) was that anyone in Israel's "congregation" was fit to offer sacrifices just like "Aaron" was. With the priesthood in mind, they were implying that any Israelite was authorized to do what "Moses" and "Aaron" were called to do because all the people were "holy." These men were probably thinking about what God said about Israel when He made the Mosaic Covenant with them (see Exodus 19:5-8). So, thinking that there was no difference in the standing with God between "Moses" and "Aaron" and the Israelites as a whole, these rebels had the unmitigated gall to say to them, "wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" Undoubtedly they had either forgotten or didn't even care that it was God who appointed both "Moses" and "Aaron" to their high positions of leadership. Note: The truth of the matter is that they had no reason to boast about the people's holiness, or about God's favour upon them. The İsraelites were less than two years away from Egyptian bondage, but they had frequently sinned, being disobedient and rebellious against God. Even at this time, God had shown His displeasure with them by declaring that they would wander in the wilderness for forty years and many would die there and not get to the Promised Land (see Numbers 14:20-38). Since Israel was now about to suffer God's discipline with forty years in the wilderness, these rebels should've been grateful to have "Moses" and "Aaron" to mediate between them and God. But instead, they were jealous and envious of them. This describes the evil spirit of those who despise and resist the powers that God has set over them (see Romans 13:1-3). Certainly, they are proud,



envious, ambitious, wicked troublemakers, and most unreasonable men.

IV. MOSES RESPONDS TO THE REBELS (Numbers 16:4-11)

A. Moses confronts Korah (Numbers 16:4-5).

1. (vs. 4). This verse says "And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face..." After listening to the accusations brought against him and Aaron, "Moses...fell upon his face" just as he had done before when the people wanted to choose a new "captain" or leader to take them back to Egypt (see Numbers 14:1-5). "Moses," falling down on "his face" was not a sign of weakness or a sign that he was giving up. It was a sign of sadness, grief and mourning for God's people. He knew where he stood with God and he also knew that God would correct this situation at Israel's expense. Note: The text does not say so, but knowing what we do about "Moses," it may be safe to assume that while he was down on "his face," he prayed to God for directions on what to say and what to do in this difficult situation. In his wisdom, "Moses" was probably determined not to say anything to his accusers until he had composed his own spirit (see Proverbs 26:4) and received instructions from God (see Proverbs 15:28; 16:23).

2. (vs. 5). This verse says "And he spake unto



Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him." When Moses finally responds to "Korah and unto all his company," he determines to let God decide the issue. Moses was well assured that the LORD had chosen him as Israel's leader, but also seemed to be content to resign if God saw fit to satisfy His discontented people by replacing him. So Moses said "Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him." In other words, Moses was convinced that the next day the LORD would, in His own way show the rebels just "who are his" or who belonged to Him; who was "holy" or has been set apart unto Him; and "who he has chosen...to come near unto him." The phrase, "to come near unto him," most likely was a reference to the privilege enjoyed by God's appointed priests. We may wonder why Moses chose to wait until "tomorrow" or the next day for God's intervention. It may be that he was giving these rebels a chance to think about what they were doing over night. Maybe they would come to their senses and forget the whole thing; or maybe not.

- B. Moses issues a challenge to his accusers (Numbers 16:6-7).
- 1. (vs. 6). This verse says, "This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company..." Now Moses begins his challenge to "Korah, and all his company" to let



God decide the issue at hand. With the words "This do," Moses was saying, "this is what I want you to do." Then he tells them to "Take you censers." A "censer" was probably a shovel-like device used for carrying live coals of fire on which incense were burned on the altar (see Exodus 30:1; 40:26-27). The "censers" used in the tabernacle were bronze (see Exodus 27:3; Leviticus 16:12), but the ones used in the temple were "of pure gold" (see I King 7:50; II Chronicles 4:22).

2. (vs. 7). This verse says "And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi." Here Moses continues to tell "Korah, and all his company" (see verse 6) what to do with their "censers" (see verse 6). He told them to "put fire therein (the censers), and put incense in them (the censers) before the LORD to morrow." The word "fire" refers to extremely hot and burning coals. The next day, Korah and his partners in crime were to bring their censers, and offer "incense...before the LORD." This practice was normally reserved for the priests only. Therefore, since many of the 250 princes involved in this rebellion were not from the tribe of "Levi," they were not allowed to offer "incense." But here it appears that in response to the rebels' declaration that all Israelites were holy and privileged like Moses (see verse 3), Moses was willing, if God allowed it, to admit that all "the LORD's" people should be priests, just as he had earlier stated that he wished all of Israel could be prophets (see Numbers 11:26-29). Once everyone had put "fire and



incense" in their censers, Moses said "it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy" or the one who is "holy." Then Moses turned their charge against him back on them when he said "ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi." They had unjustly charged Moses and Aaron with "taking too much upon" themselves (see verse 3), even though they had done no more than what God had appointed them to do. Those that take it upon themselves to control and contradict God's appointments are taking too much upon themselves or being presumptuous. The truth is that it should be enough for us to simply submit and obey. Moses then called these rebels "the sons of Levi" because it appears that some of "the sons of Levi" had joined with Korah in his rebellion and were also looking for power and prestige. As descendants or "sons of Levi," many of these rebels were from the same tribe as Moses and Aaron who were also from the tribe of "Levi" (see Exodus 2:1) and descendants of Kohath (see Exodus 6:18, 20). But here these Levites, who were relatives of Moses and Aaron, were mounting a mutiny not only against them, but against God as well. It hadn't been long since "the sons of Levi" had bravely stood on God's side regarding the golden calf incident and God blessed them for it (see Exodus 32:1-6, 26-29). Now they were acting more like rebels than Levites.

- C. Moses reminds his accusers of their privileged position (Numbers 16:8-9).
- 1. (vs. 8). This verse says "And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi..." Turning his attention directly to "Korah," and reminding him that he



was one of the "sons of Levi," God's servant "Moses" said "Hear, I pray you." He was begging "Korah" and the other Levites who were part of this rebellion to listen to him closely.

2. (vs. 9). This verse says "Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?" Here Moses continues to tell Korah and the sons of Levi what it was he wanted them to hear (see verse 8). He said "Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?" Everything here that Moses said God had "separated" or chose the Levites from the rest of the Israelites to do refers to the privilege they had as Levites. That privilege included God bringing them "near to Himself" to serve in the "tabernacle," and "stand before the congregation to minister unto them." It is an honor for God's ministers to be the church's ministers which adds to the dignity God has placed on them. The truth was that as Levites, it was a great honor to be chosen by God to care for the vessels of the sanctuary, and to be used in any part of the service of the tabernacle. These rebels needed to be reminded that it was the God of Israel who "separated" them. It was His choice to put them in their position of service, and so they should've been satisfied and grateful. In addition, they also needed to



be reminded that it was God who put Aaron in his place as high priest, and therefore they had no reason to envy him. So Moses convicted them of the sin of dishonoring their privileges when he asked them if they thought having those privileges was "a small thing" or without honor. As believers, we should take the privilege of drawing near to God seriously and never even think about it being "a small thing." But when we see those who neglect opportunities to draw near to God, and consider it to be a task and not a joy, maybe they need to be asked: "Do you think that it's a small thing that God has allowed you to come near to him?"

D. Moses condemns the rebellious acts (Numbers 16:10-11).

1. (vs. 10). This verse says "And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?" After asking Korah and his accompanying Levites, if they thought it was a small thing that God had given them the privilege of coming near Him by serving in the tabernacle, Moses declared that "he (God) hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee." Moses was confirming the fact that not only had God "brought" Korah "near to him," but He had also given that privilege to the all the Levites, "the sons of Levi." The Levites who served in the tabernacle were actually close to God's earthly presence He revealed in the tabernacle. **Note:** It should be noted that all the priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. This is because God appointed Aaron, his sons, and their descendants to the



actual priesthood—offering burnt offerings and leading the people in worship and confession. But all the other Levites who were not descendants directly from Aaron were appointed to serve as assistants to the priests, taking care of the tabernacle and the Temple and performing other necessary menial duties (see Numbers 8:5-15, 19-26). Younger Levites began as assistants to the priests and then progressed to the higher duties and offices such as doorkeeper, member of the Temple orchestra, or administrators. In the days before the Temple was built and the people worshipped in the tabernacle, the Levites always carried the tabernacle and its furniture when the camp was moved. Then they erected and cared for the tent in its new location. They guarded it, and cleaned it and its furniture (see Numbers 1:50-53; 3:3-9; 4:1-33). Unlike the other tribes of Israel, the Levites did not receive any territorial inheritance in the Promised Land of Canaan. God Himself was to be their portion (see Numbers 18:20), and He commanded that 48 cities be set apart for them along with enough pasture for their cattle (see Numbers 35:1-8). In addition, they were to receive the tithes due to God from the people's fruits of the fields, the flocks and herds, and certain portions of the people's sacrificial offerings (see Numbers 18:24). From these tithes, the Levites had to give a tithe (a tenth part) to the priests (see Numbers 18:26-29). The Levites had honorable jobs and positions and they were well cared for by the people so only pride, jealousy and envy could make them want more. A lesson for us here is that we should be grateful and honored for any position God gives us, especially since we may not



deserve it. God knows who we are and what we are fit to do in His service and we ought to be satisfied with that and not seek higher office that God has not given to us. Having confirmed to Korah that God had given him and the Levites the special privilege of being near Him, Moses then said to him, "and seek ye the priesthood also?" The Levites privileged position as servants in the tabernacle and among God's people should've been enough for them; so there was no need for the Levites who were not called to be priests to seek the honor of "the priesthood." The text does not literally say that this is what these rebels were after, but Moses could see that they had their eyes on "the priesthood." We would avoid a lot of trouble if we remember that whatever God has called and appointed us to do, is probably more than we deserve so we ought to be satisfied with it.

2. (vs. 11). This verse says "For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?" The phrase "For which cause" means "this is the reason." Moses was saying to Korah that desiring the priesthood was the reason "thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD." Moses sees their mutiny for what it really is—a rebellion "against the LORD." As we noted earlier, any rebellion against God's chosen is a rebellion against Him. Then Moses said, "and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?" These insurrectionists were complaining against "Aaron" because he and his descendants were the only ones in Israel chosen to be priests with Aaron being the high priest. They needed to



be reminded that it was God who put "Aaron" in his place as high priest, and therefore they had no reason to envy him. If murmurers and complainers would consider that the people they have a quarrel with are instruments used by God, and that they are whatever He makes them, they would not be so bold and free to complain and "murmur against" them and therefore "against the LORD."

V. THE REBELLIOUS LEVITES BLAME MOSES (Numbers 16:12-14)

A. Dathan and Abiram refuse Moses' summons (Numbers 16:12). This verse says "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up..." Since "Moses" had heard what Korah had to say (see verse 3), and had answered him (see verses 5-11), he "sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up." Now "Moses" summoned "Dathan and Abiram," two of the other members of this rebellion probably to hear their complaints. But instead of answering "Moses'" call, they said, "We will not come up." They refused to obey his summons because they refused to accept his authority. They were showing the highest disregard for God's chosen leader and therefore they were showing the highest disregard for God Himself. Nothing good could ever come out of that!

B. Dothan and Abiram make an accusation against Moses (Numbers 16:13-14).



1. (vs. 13). This verse says "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?" As Dathan and Abiram continued their defiance of Moses, they accused him of having done them a great deal of wrong by bringing them out of Egypt. They said "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness." The way they described Egypt reveals just how depraved these two men had become. They described Egypt, where they had been slaves for 400 years, as "a land that floweth with milk and honey" if it was the Promised Land that God described as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (see Exodus 3:8; 3:17; 13:5). But whatever they had in Egypt as slaves could never compare to the "milk and honey" of Canaan. They were not only lying to Moses, they were lying to themselves. These were truly some ungrateful men. They were implying that the Promised Land, which was probably the greatest favor God has ever shown to any people, could not be compared to life in Egyptian bondage. They went so far as to accuse Moses of taking them out of Egypt only "to kill us in the wilderness." But the truth is, they were well provided for while they were in "the wilderness." And if they didn't die in "the wilderness," they accused Moses of wanting to "make thyself altogether a prince (or ruler) over us." How ridiculous is that! Moses never even pretended to want to rule over them. Throughout the wilderness wanderings, Moses behaved like a tender father to them; constantly interceding for them before God every time they sinned, and that was often. And yet Dathan and



Abiram were complaining as if Moses was exerting authority that was heavier and more difficult to take than Pharaoh's was. Moses was far from wanting to be a "prince" or ruler over them. Even when he was called by God to deliver His people from bondage, Moses tried to wiggle his way out (see Exodus 3:10-13; 4:1, 19). There were many times that he would have been ready and willing to give up the position as Israel's leader that God appointed Him to. So, he wanted to be "a prince over" Israel? I think not! But still, these rebels were characterizing Moses as a would-be tyrant and a usurper of authority.

2. (vs. 14). Our final verse says "Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up." As Dathan and Abiram continued their response refusing Moses' summons, they accused him of lying to the people. Moses had told them that God was leading them to Canaan, "a land that floweth with milk and honey" and He would also give them the land as an inheritance (see Exodus 13:5; Leviticus 20:24). So they accused Moses of lying about both of those things when they said "Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards." But the real question is whose fault was that? Moses had brought them to the borders of Canaan, waiting for God to give them possession of it. However, because of the people's lack of faith and rebellious attitude (see Numbers 14:1-14), they would not so much as see the Promised Land (see Numbers



14:22-23). It was totally their own fault that they were not now in Canaan, but they blamed Moses for that. The wise man said it correctly, and these rebels proved it: "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord" (see Proverbs 19:3). Then Dathan and Abiram said to Moses, wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up." With this statement, they were accusing Moses of wanting to lead them as if they were blind and had no say so in where they were going. But if the truth be told, if Moses intended to do anything it was to open the eyes of God's people so they could see what God saw in them—total rebellion, for they repeated their words of defiance and disobedience saying "we will not come up" (see verse 12).

VI. Conclusion. It's true that the wisest and best people cannot please everybody, nor will they receive good words from everybody. Those who have earned the highest praise often fall under the heaviest opposition. With God's help, Moses did many good works for Israel, but no one complained about those. In this week's lesson, Korah and his partners in crime, repeatedly accused Moses of keeping them out of the Promised Land. They actually accused him of lying about going there and they all were going to die in the wilderness. But that was not Moses' decision, it was God's. It isn't easy to submit to others when what we expect to happen in our future looks hopeless. But if we are going to please God, we must respond humbly and submissively to those He has appointed.



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