

Numbers Lesson 16

Numbers Chapter 16

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Memory verses for this week: *Col 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

Introduction: We continue our study on Numbers this week as we continue in Chapter 16. Last week we studied about the judgment that came to those who did not follow the ceremonial law. It was expected of the Lord that people obey the laws God laid down, and serious consequences came when people broke the Law.

I. The Rebellion of Korah

Num 16:1 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:

Num 16:2 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:

Num 16:3 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?

We find one of the sons of Kohath, Korah, rises up against Moses. It seemed that Moses was constantly being challenged by some of the children of Israel. And Korah's rebellion was so bad that it was warned against 1,450 years after the fact by Jude in his epistle in verse 11.

Jude 1:11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Core in this verse is the same person Korah we read about here in Numbers Chapter 16. When the Holy Spirit puts a man in the same company with Cain who murdered his own brother, and Balaam who was a covetous deceiver, you know that he is really on a bad list from the Lord. His sin was refusing to accept God's duly appointed authority which was Moses and Aaron.

Korah was a Levite, a descendant of Kohath as we mentioned earlier. His responsibility was in the service of the tabernacle. The Kohathites were responsible for caring for the articles of the tabernacle. Perhaps this was not enough for him and he wanted greater authority as his first cousins Moses and Aaron. He tells them they took too much upon them since all the congregation were holy. Now whether the whole congregation was really holy is certainly debatable, but even if they were, Moses was God's chosen man to lead the people.

Korah and his followers were not very respectful of God's man. In verse 1, it also speaks of several others. Dathan and Abiram were Reubenites who had no Levitical authority, but apparently sought recognition. On was also from the tribe of Reuben and is never mentioned again anywhere in the bible. The people with them, 250 accomplices, were well known and highly respected Israelites. It says that they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

While it sounded like they had Moses' good intentions at heart when they said he took too much upon him, in reality they were using it as a ploy to gain fame for themselves. Carnal men, even saved men who are away from the Lord, will sometimes want to run the show and may stop at nothing to get their own way.

Num 16:4 And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face:

Num 16:5 And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will show 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.

Num 16:6 This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company;

Num 16:7 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.

Moses was a very humble man, and in verse 4 it says he fell upon his face seeking God's guidance. He tells Korah and his followers that the Lord would show who were his the following day, and who was holy. God certainly knows those who are truly living for him, and those who may be seeking fame or popularity. Moses then gives instruction in verses 6 and 7 to Korah.

He was to put fire in the censers. Censers were pans for live coals and were used in making burnt offering unto the Lord. God would show whom He had chosen to lead by accepting the offering of the censer. It is ironic that these men were guilty of exactly what they accused Moses of being he says in verse 7 "Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi."

Whatever our job is, large or small, we should do it to the best of our ability, and do only that job. What God chooses is exactly what we should do. God will not

have all men preach, nor teach, or do other specific jobs. But whatever it is that we are appointed to do, we should do it the best we can.

Col 3:23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

Col 3:24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

II. Moses Speaks Against Korah

Num 16:8 And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi:

Num 16:9 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?

Num 16:10 And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

Num 16:11 For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?

Moses chastises Korah by reminding him of the closeness he enjoyed with the Lord while doing the ministry of the Kohathites. He had an important job, and he was wrong in try to move himself up to the job of a priest.

Because of being puffed up, they had caused a lot of people to murmur against Moses and to go against the Lord. We need to realize our actions either encourage people in the work of the Lord or discourage them. God help us to be ones that encourage and go forth with the work of the Lord.

III. Disobedience of Dathan and Abiram

Num 16:12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up:

Num 16:13 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?

Num 16:14 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.

Num 16:15 And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.

We find the sons of Eliab, Dathan and Abiram, who say they will not come up. They accuse Moses of making their lives worse rather than better. They claim

that he wants to be a prince over them. How soon they forgot from which they came. For 400 years, the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt, and while they had not yet come to the land of milk and honey, God had promised it to them and would deliver when the time come. They accuse Moses of being a deceiver to leaders of Israel by 'putting out their eyes'.

This meant that he was effectively throwing dust in the people's eyes so they could not see things clearly. Of course this was not true at all. Moses asks the Lord to not respect their offering and explains that he has done nothing to harm these men. Like Moses, in Jesus' day, they said that they didn't want Him to rule over the Jews. How easy it is to rebel against the Lord. In the parable of the Nobleman, we see how they rejected the Lord.

Luke 19:12 He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

Luke 19:13 And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

Luke 19:14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

Matthew Henry pointed out the lack of understanding these men had.

Moses could soon in God's name send messengers of death for them. But thus the God of this world *blinds the minds of those that believe not*. But by the same messengers they send their articles of impeachment against Moses; and the charge runs very high. 1. They charge him with having done them a great deal of wrong in bringing them out of Egypt, invidiously calling that *a land flowing with milk and honey*, v. 13. Onions, and garlic, and fish, they had indeed plenty of in Egypt, but it never pretended to milk and honey; only they would thus banter the promise of Canaan. Ungrateful wretches, to represent that as an injury to them which was really the greatest favour that ever was bestowed upon any people! 2. They charge him with a design upon their lives, that he intended to *kill them in the wilderness*, though they were so well provided for. And, if they were sentenced to die in the wilderness, they must thank themselves. Moses would have healed them, and they would not be healed.

3. They charge him with a design upon their liberties, that he meant to enslave them, by *making himself a prince over them*. A prince over them! Was he not a tender father to them? nay, their devoted servant for the Lord's sake? Had they not their properties secured, their order preserved, and justice impartially administered? Did they not live in ease and honour? And yet they complain as if Moses' yoke were heavier than Pharaoh's. And did Moses make himself a prince? Far from it. How gladly would he have declined the office at first! How gladly would he have resigned it many a time since! And yet he is thus put under the blackest characters of

a tyrant and a usurper. 4. They charge him with cheating them, raising their expectations of a good land, and then defeating them (v. 14): *Thou hast not brought us, as thou promised us, into a land that floweth with milk and honey*; and pray whose fault was that?

He had brought them to the borders of it, and was just ready, under God, to put them in possession of it; but they thrust it away from them, and shut the door against themselves; so that it was purely their own fault that they were not now in Canaan, and yet Moses must bear the blame. Thus when the *foolishness of man perverteth his way his heart fretteth against the Lord*, Prov. 19:3 1

Num 16:16 And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow:

Num 16:17 And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.

Num 16:18 And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron.

Num 16:19 And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.

Additional instructions were given to Korah. They were to take every man a censer and bring them before the Lord. 250 men were to bring censers and stand in the door of the congregation of the tabernacle and stand against Moses and Aaron. It says at the end of verse 19 that the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation.

Num 16:20 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

Num 16:21 Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.

Num 16:22 And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?

Num 16:23 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Num 16:24 Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Num 16:25 And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him.

Num 16:26 And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.

1Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

Num 16:27 So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.

The voice of God tells Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the congregation so that he might consume them. Moses and Aaron cry out and ask God to be merciful and not destroy all the congregation over one man's sin. In reality, there were many more than one who had sinned, but Korah was certainly the ringleader of the rebellion.

They saw the problem stemming from Korah, and Lord speaks and tells them got get up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. So the elders go with Moses and they direct the people to depart and to stay away from those 2 men and the tents and all their possessions. They and their families come and stood in the door of their tents.

IV. Judgment Brought to Korah and the 250 who Rebelled

Num 16:28 And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind.

Num 16:29 If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me.

Num 16:30 But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.

Moses explains that he had only been obedient to the Lord. If these who had rebelled died a normal death, then they would know that God had not sent him. But if the earth opened up and swallowed these into the pit, then they would know that Moses was true and called of the Lord.

Num 16:31 And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them:

Num 16:32 And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.

Num 16:33 They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

Num 16:34 And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also.

Num 16:35 And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

The creator of the earth opens up the mouth of the earth and swallows up both Korah and all his conspirators. This was absolute proof that Moses was God's chosen man and the one to whom the people should respect and follow. It says

that all those round about fled at the cry of them who perished. After all those with Korah were swallowed up, it says a fire came from the Lord and consumed all 250 men who were offering the incense.

V. Instructions Given to Aaron's Son Eleazar

Num 16:36 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Num 16:37 Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed.

Num 16:38 The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.

Num 16:39 And Eleazar the priest took the brazen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar:

Num 16:40 To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.

God gives instructions via Moses for Eleazar to regather all the censers used by these unholy men. The censers had been hallowed, and they were to be a sign unto the children of Israel that they might remember and learn from this incident. These were testimonies against these sinful men who tried to use holy things in an unholy manner.

Eleazar does as the Lord commands, and this was a sign for future generations of Israelites. From that day on, no stranger or anyone not of the seed of Aaron was allowed to offer incense unto the Lord. If they did, they might go the way of Korah and his company. You would think after this, God would have the peoples attention and they would learn something. But these people were very stiff-necked.

Exo 32:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:

Exo 32:10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

Exo 34:9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.

Prov 29:1 He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

VI. Surprise... the People Murmur Against Moses and Aaron

Num 16:41 But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.

Num 16:42 And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.

Num 16:43 And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation.

Num 16:44 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Num 16:45 Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.

You would think that somewhere along the way, the people would get a clue that God gave them Moses to guide them, and it would be a wise thing to shut up and follow his guidance. But this was no ordinary group of sensible people. It says that the following morning, they are murmuring already against Moses and Aaron and saying that it was they who had killed the people of the Lord.

They were there, and they saw God destroy the people, but yet they blame God's men for this. The cloud covered the tabernacle and God's glory appeared. God tells the two of them to get away from the congregation so that he could consume the whole group. These people were teetering on the edge of total destruction. What an image and type of Christ we have in Moses and Aaron who intercede for the people. I thank the Lord that daily we have Christ to be our mediator between us and God.

1 Tim 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

1 Tim 2:6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Num 16:46 And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun.

Num 16:47 And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people.

Num 16:48 And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

Num 16:49 Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah.

Num 16:50 And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed.

Rather than being glad God was destroying those who rebelled and murmured against them, Moses and Aaron are Christ-like and the fall on their faces in humility. They had genuine love and concern.

J. Vernon McGee points out how it was the ones who they murmured against that saved them from being all killed.

The next day, after they had brooded over it all night, they charge Moses and Aaron with murdering the rebels! Moses and Aaron didn't do it, you see; God did it. Notice again that after their murmuring, the glory of the Lord appears.

Now God is ready to judge this murmuring people. The very man about whom they are complaining is the one who stands between the people and God in order to avert His judgment from them. 2

But a plague comes down on the people, and Aaron takes the censer at Moses' command run among the people and made an atonement for the people. There he stood, standing between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed. But not before another 14,700 people died on that day. This is a picture of Christ standing between us and death, having made atonement for our sins. Because of rebellion, nearly 15,000 people died.

But the chapter ends on a happy note in that the plague was stayed. When sin is involved, the only way to end conflict with God is to repent and obey the Lord. When we come with a repentant heart through the blood of Christ, we can be forgiven.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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2J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed.*, Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1981 by J. Vernon McGee.

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