

קֹרַח

KORACH / KORAH Bemidbar/Numbers 16:1-18:32

It seems that the Exodus generation has seen one crisis after another as a result of **grumbling** and/or a **lack of faith**. Last week they were given the tragic news that those over 20 would **not enter the Promised Land**. **Emotions** had to be running wild, and this week we see a man named **Korah** attempt to take advantage of that situation. It was a fatal error on his part and also for those who bought into plans to **rebel** against יהוה's (Yahwey's) anointed, **Moses and Aaron**.

Our Parsha begins with a terrible **rebellion** and an **attempt to overthrow Moses and Aaron** as the leaders of the nation. Korah is a **first cousin** to Moses and Aaron. He is a **Levite**, though not of the **priestly line**. This meant neither he nor anyone from his clan would ever be able to **perform rituals** or **wear the priestly garb**, or **enter the inner chambers of the Tabernacle**. It is probable that **resentment** built up when **Moses became the leader** of the nation, and **Aaron** and his descendents were **given the priesthood**. Did Korah wait for an **opportunity to discredit Moses**? Did he find this opportunity in the **aftermath** of the Israelites being told that they **would not enter the Promised Land**?

It seems that Korah had no problems getting the **support of Dathan, Abiram, and On** from the tribe of **Reuben**. This **tribe** also may have harbored **resentment**, for Reuben had lost his **firstborn position to Joseph**. The stigma of **shame** was probably still **associated with that tribe**.

1 Chronicles 5:1 Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel -- he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright;

And then we have mention of **250 leaders from the various tribes**. These men were likely also **firstborn** who had watched **their priestly position handed over to the Levites**:

Bemidbar 3:12 "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine,

It's a **volatile situation** and exacerbated by the fact that these people have just been told that they will spend the next 40 years in the desert **without ever reaching the Promised Land**. Desperate people do desperate things and are **easily coerced by a man with a plan**.

Bemidbar 16:3 They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and יהוה is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of יהוה?"

The argument was that they **ALL** ought to have the **same rights and privileges** as Moses and Aaron. They declared themselves **ALL to be holy** based on the fact that they'd all been brought out of Egypt:

Vayikra/Leviticus 11:45 'For I am יהוה who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your Elohim. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

What they were arguing for was **democracy**. They wanted the **freedom to elect their own leaders** who would be **sensitive to the desires of the people.....power to the people!** The constitutional form of **government based on the Torah** (the divine revelation from יהוה of **eternal and unchanging truths**) was not as appealing to them as operating by the **will of the people** based on their right to do **what** they want to do, **when** they want to do it, and **how** they want to do it...**regardless of the Torah** or of the **anointed of יהוה**.

Is this attitude something **new**? At the base of this revolt is **rebellion** against יהוה – an **elevation of man in his own eyes** and an **attempt to diminish יהוה**. We know who the **first rebel** was and what his **consequence** was:

*Isaiah 14:12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O **Lucifer**, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!¹³ For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of Elohim; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north;¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'*

In the Garden of Eden, **Adam and Eve** met up with this **rebel, Lucifer**, who enticed them to **rebel and desire a position where they would be able to determine for themselves what was right and wrong**. Again...they desire **power to the people!**

Bereshith/Genesis 3:4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.⁵ "For Elohim knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Elohim, knowing good and evil."

The pattern continues throughout Scripture as we read of **Nimrod attempting to exalt man through human efforts up to the level of יהוה** by building a tower and making a **name for themselves**:

Bereshith 11:4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

The pattern of **following your own desires and rebelling against the authority of the Almighty** is the subject of the book of **Jude**, the half brother of **Yeshua**:

*Jude 1:4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our Yah into lewdness and deny the only Adonai Elohim and our Adonai Messiah Yeshua.⁵ But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Adonai, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.... these dreamers defile the flesh, **reject authority**, and **speak evil of dignitaries..... But these speak evil of whatever they do not know**; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things **they corrupt themselves**.¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and **perished in the rebellion of Korah...**¹⁶ These are **grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts**;*

and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.¹⁷ But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Adonai Messiah Yeshua:¹⁸ how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.¹⁹ These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

In **reaction** to the rebellion of the people, **Moses falls on his face**. When he speaks again to Korah, he gives the people an **opportunity to prove the holiness they claimed** to have:

***Bemidbar 16:4** So when Moses heard it, **he fell on his face**;⁵ and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning **יהוה** will show who is His and **who is holy**, and will cause him to come near to Him. **That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him.**⁶ "Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company;⁷ "put fire in them and put incense in them before **יהוה** tomorrow, and it shall be that **the man whom יהוה chooses is the holy one**. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"*

You have to wonder if they didn't remember the sins of Nadav and Avihu who were killed when offering up "strange fire". The Torah stated that only **Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's descendants** were able to **draw near** to יהוה in the Tabernacle. **Other descendants of Levi**, and certainly **other tribe members** were **warned by penalty of death NOT to draw near!** It is evident that Korah had convinced these leaders that **Torah commandments were not valid!**

The sages teach in the Midrash (Shoher Tov) that **Korah told the following parable** to the people:

A poor widow had a field. When she came to plow it, Moses forbade her to plow it with an ox and an ass together; when she began to sow, Moses forbade her to sow it with mingled seeds. At the time of harvest, Moses ordered her to leave unreaped the corners of the field and not to gather up the gleanings, but to leave them for the poor. He furthermore demanded the heave-offering for the priests, and the tithe for the Levites. The woman sold the field and purchased ewes, in the hope that she might live undisturbed. However, when the firstling of the sheep was born, Aaron appeared and demanded it as his due. At shearing-time Aaron reappeared and demanded "the first of the fleece of the sheep", which, according to Moses' Law, was his. He reappeared again and again with new demands, till the long-suffering woman slaughtered the sheep, and in her anger consecrated it to the Sanctuary. Therefore, everything went to Aaron...' 'Such men,' Korah concluded, 'are Moses and Aaron!'

Is this still the way that we see Torah? **Do we see the commandments as a yoke that is too heavy and which gives preferential treatment to a select few?** The ways of Torah were intended to bring about **shalom, shalom (perfect peace)**, yet from the gist of this parable, it seems that this poor woman **suffered constantly as a result of keeping the commandments**.

A second look at the story shows **Korah used distortion, spoke out of context, and left out pertinent facts**. The story of the **hardship of a widow** was meant to **elicit strong emotion** stemming from the **circumstances surrounding this widow's suffering**. Did the **Torah** know no mercy?!!

What is left out? **Did he mention that the Torah shows special concern for the widow?**

Devarim/Deuteronomy 24:17 "You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, **nor take a widow's garment as a pledge.**

Shemot/Exodus 22:22 "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 24:19 " When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; **it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that יהוה your Elohim may bless you in all the work of your hands.**²⁰ "When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; **it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.**

Okay, back to Bemidbar 16:5... did you notice that this **test** was to happen "**in the morning?**" And read what else Moses said to Korah to "**think about**" until then:

Bemidbar 16:8 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi:⁹ "Is it a small thing to you that **the Elohim of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of יהוה, and to stand before the congregation to serve them;**¹⁰ "and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? **And are you seeking the priesthood also?**

Moses gave them a chance to "**sleep on it**" before the **dangerous test** to take place in the **morning**. He urged them to **be content with the tremendous amount of prestige that they'd already been given** (Bemidbar 4). Only the **priesthood** itself was **beyond their reach**. What they failed to recognize was that **a distinction in the roles of service to יהוה** was separate from the **personal value of each individual**.

Today the **body of Messiah** continues to **function through individual roles**. **Huge problems** can be the result when **someone decides that their role is not important or not high profile enough**. There are certain "**good works created beforehand for us that we might walk in them**" (Ephesians 2:10). If each of us is **obedient** to performing our own **good works**, we become part of a **unity** that will bring about the **purified bride of Messiah**:

1 Corinthians 12:12 For as **the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Messiah.**¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.¹⁴ For in fact **the body is not one member but many.**¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?¹⁸ **But now Yah has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.**¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be?²⁰ But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."²² No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.²³ And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty,²⁴ but our presentable parts have no need. But Yah composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,²⁵ **that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.**

Well, Moses sends for **Dathan and Abiram** who refuse his order to come up:

Bemidbar 16:12 *And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up!"¹³ "Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us?"¹⁴ "Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"*

Why does Moses **single them out**? Some Jewish commentators see them as an **independent group**. From their comments, it seems that they are **more interested in the political leadership** and **less in the priesthood of Israel** – for they had no desire to offer up the **incense**. They **defiantly refuse Moses' summons**. What's their real problem? Remember when **Moses** first became their **leader** in Egypt, he **promised to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey**:

Shemot/Exodus 3:16 *"Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, יהוה Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt;"¹⁷ "and I have said **I will bring you up** out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, **to a land flowing with milk and honey.**" "*

Now, however, Moses has told them that **they will no longer make it to the land**, but will **instead die in the wilderness!** Can you understand the **utter despair and disappointment** that would lead to the **rejection of the leadership and authority of Moses**? In their eyes he had **failed as the nation's leader** and totally **renege on his promise!** Now notice Moses' response to them:

Bemidbar 16:15 *Then Moses was very angry, and said to יהוה, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them."¹⁶ And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before יהוה -- you and they, as well as Aaron.*

By only reading the English, it appears that Moses is asking יהוה to reject their **incense** "קִטְרֶת" **offering**. But the Hebrew for **offering** here is "מִנְחָה", more properly translated as a **grain offering**. They have already indicated **they would NOT bring an incense offering** (Bemidbar 16:14). Moses is asking יהוה to **reject all of the offerings they may bring** as **they have not respected the legitimacy of Moses' divinely appointed leadership**. Dathan and Abiram are **attempting to worship outside of the boundaries of Torah**....in a way **they** have determined to be **proper**.

It is now **morning** in Bemidbar 16:17, and the **250 leaders of the tribes** have brought their **censers**. They must have had **high expectations of being accepted**, but in front of the entire congregation the glory of יהוה appears and speaks to Aaron and Moses:

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

Moses and Aaron both **intercede for the people** who have been **mised**. By the way...this is an **example** for us also to **pray for those who have been misled**. Moses seems to place all the **blame on Korah**:

***Bemidbar 16:22** Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O El, the Elohim of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"*

But what happens **next**? It seems that יהוה switches His focus to **Dathan and Abiram**. They were supposed to have been there **at the tabernacle with their censers**, but appear to be “**no shows**.” They’re not going to get away with that, and we now switch from the location of the tabernacle **to the tents within the camp of the Reubenites**:

***Bemidbar 16:23** So יהוה spoke to Moses, saying,²⁴ "Speak to the congregation, saying, '**Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.**'" ²⁵ Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him.²⁶ And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "**Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins.**"*

The congregation is told to **separate from those who represent a society and a way of life that is in rebellion against יהוה's Torah as presented through Moses**. There is a time in the **future** when again the Almighty will **call out His people** from among the **rebellious**:

Jeremiah 51:5** For Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah, By his Elohim, יהוה of hosts, Though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel."⁶ **Flee from the midst of Babylon, And every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, For this is the time of יהוה's vengeance; He shall recompense her.

Matthew 24:15** " Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),¹⁶ "then let **those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Revelation 18:4** And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "**Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

Until that time of being called out, we must **continue the ministry of Yeshua** who associated with those in need of their Messiah:

***Matthew 9:11** And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "**Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?**"¹² When Yeshua heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."¹³ "But go and learn what this means: '**I desire mercy and not sacrifice.**' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

Yeshua told his disciples:

***Matthew 5:13** "You are the salt of the earth..."*

Salt is not only a **preservative**, but it also acts as a **disinfectant and healing agent**. Yeshua tells His **disciples** that they will have **that effect on the world**. Like Moses and Aaron, **our presence and our intercession** should hold off יהוה's **judgment and wrath**. Most of us live and work among **unbelievers** and those who **do not believe Torah is applicable**. יהוה's **righteous anger** at sin is **held back** and waiting for a **particular season** so that others will have time to come **to know Him and become disciples**. Until then, it's our job to **"make disciples"** (Matthew 28:19).

Now we have learned as we study the Hebrew perspective that **events occur in cycles**. This whole scenario with Korah, Dathan, Abiram, the 250, and the other rebellious ones sounds like something we read about in 2 Thessalonians. I'll add in my comments alongside the Scripture:

2 Thessalonians 2:1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Adonai Messiah Yeshua and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Messiah had come.³ **Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first** (a major rebellion like we've been reading in Bemidbar 16), **and the man of sin is revealed** (someone like Korah), **the son of perdition,**⁴ **who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called Yah** (this is what Korah did) **or that is worshiped** (attempts his own worship), **so that he sits as El in the temple of Elohim, showing himself that he is Elohim.**⁵ **Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?**⁶ **And now you know what is restraining** (Moses and Aaron restrained through their intercession), **that he may be revealed in his own time** (all witnessed the anger and the wrath of יהוה).⁷ **For the mystery of Torahlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way** (there will be a time when intercession will stop).⁸ **And then the Torahless one will be revealed, whom Elohim will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming** (like the judgment of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and others who identified with them).

Returning now to Bemidbar, we see that the **judgment** finally comes to the tents of Dathan, Abiram, and Korah:

Bemidbar 16:31 the ground split apart under them,³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods.

They had **opened their mouths and spoken against Moses**. Now in a **measure for measure judgment**, the **ground opens up and swallows them up**. All their possessions and goods... **everything of Egypt** that had been so important to them....gone in a moment. The **Egyptians** were very focused on taking their wealth with them when they died. Was יהוה making a point here?

Again the **scene changes** and we're back to the tabernacle where **the 250 have been waiting with their incense**. The Torah is quick and **to the point**:

Bemidbar 16:35 And a fire came out from יהוה and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

Time is up. There is **no more time for repentance**. It seems odd that **NO ONE repented** during this whole process. **Or was there someone who did?**

On, son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben is mentioned in Bemidbar 16:2, associated with Dathan and Abiram. We do not hear of him being judged. **Good for him**. Though he erred in his connection with Dathan and Abiram, **he must have humbled himself and repented before it was too late!**

We're **not quite finished** with the **judgment** yet. There was still grumbling and discontent in the camp. People always seem to be questioning **יהוה's ways of doing things**, even though we're told:

*Isaiah 55:8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says יהוה.
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

The **people blame Moses and Aaron** for the deaths of their leaders, and the glory of **יהוה** appears in their **defense**. **Again**, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces to **intercede** for the nation. Moses instructed Aaron what to do, yet **14,700 people died**:

*Bemidbar 16:46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put **fire in it from the altar**, put **incense on it**, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from יהוה. The plague has begun."⁴⁷ Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and **ran into the midst of the assembly**; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people.⁴⁸ And **he stood between the dead and the living**; so the plague was stopped.*

Let's not gloss over the **significance of what Aaron did**. **Aaron stood between the "dead and the living"** in order to **arrest the plague**. As the High Priest, **he was forbidden to come into contact with the dead lest he become defiled**. However, the situation was so serious with all of Israel being **under the curse of the plague**, that **he was the only one who could make atonement**. His action **saved the nation!**

The High Priest, representing **Yeshua the Messiah (our High Priest)**, took **fire from the altar** (symbolizing a **sacrifice**), and **incense** (represents **intercession**), and **defiled himself** by standing **face to face with death**. **He defeated death**. **HalleluYah!**

There are a few others who may have **repented**. **Korah's children** did not die in the judgment (Bemidbar 26:11). In fact **eleven of the Psalms** are attributed to the **sons of Korah**. Also, a few generations later, **another descendent of Korah** will be born – **Samuel the prophet** who will ironically also **challenge the priesthood** of Eli's sons. But this time, it will be because the **priesthood truly is corrupt**. Later **Samuel**, descendent of Korah will become a **judge** and be the **one to anoint Saul as the first king over the Israelites**...and later he will also anoint **David**.

Korah will forever be synonymous with **rebellion**, but his **descendent Samuel** will have this to say about **rebellion**:

1 Samuel 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Korah was **successful in gaining the respect** and the following of thousands of people. He gained their **loyalty** through their **emotions**, not by the **truth that they had learned**. He must have been a **great orator** to gain the allegiance of so many people. In the **tribulation**, there will be **another great speaker who will lead large numbers of people astray**. We know him as the **anti-messiah**, but to many **he will appear to be the savior of the world**. Like Korah, he will **speak against the authority of יהוה** and **gain the people's trust**:

*Revelation 13:5 And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.⁶ Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against Yah, to **blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.**⁷ It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.⁸ **All who dwell on the earth will worship him**, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

Praise Yah, we know **the end from the beginning**. We know that the Almighty, though He is patient and longsuffering, will **defeat the anti-messiah and all those who do not repent**. There's **still time**, but we don't know **how much**. Today our High Priest, **Yeshua intercedes** for those who've been **led astray**. Let's **join Him in intercession!**

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle