

Korach

קרח "Korah"

Numbers 16:1 – 18:32

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion deals primarily with Korah's rebellion. This dramatic story teaches many valuable lessons about how God expects us to interact with our leadership and how he views rebellion. Implicit in this lesson is that it is God who establishes those in leadership positions and He will direct events such that His will is accomplished.

1. Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On - 16:1-50

a) From what tribes were Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On? What was Korah's assigned vocation? How closely do you think these men lived to one another?

Korah was a Levite (specifically a Kohathite) and Dathan, Abiram, and On were Reubenites. As a Kohathite, Korah's responsibilities included transporting the sacred furnishings of the Tabernacle. The Kohathites and the Reubenites encamped next to each other on the south side of the Tabernacle.

b) Who else joined these four in their activities? What was the essence of their argument to Moses and Aaron? What do you think their real motivation or complaint was?

Two hundred fifty community leaders joined Korah arguing that every man was equally holy and able to hear from God. They didn't need Moses and Aaron's leadership. They were probably jealous and wanted leadership for themselves.

c) Do you think Korah's reasons for rebelling against Moses and Aaron were different than the others? What arguments might he have used to get the others to join him?

Korah in particular may have been jealous of Aaron's role as high priest. He had no reason to think that Aaron was any more qualified than he was. He may have accused Moses of keeping the power in his family.

What was Korah's Complaint?

According to **Numbers 16:3**, Korah believed that every Israelite was holy and able to lead the nation. (This may have been a by-product of the experience related in **Numbers 11** in which the Spirit of God was imparted to the 70 elders.) Essentially, Korah's question to Moses was, "Who put you and Aaron in charge?" Thus Korah was rebelling against God.

The Rebellion Grows

Korah and his three Reubenite cohorts spread their rebellious ideas until they had 250 Israelite elders involved in the crime. Can you imagine how some of the conversations may have gone?

Moses' Reaction

It was Moses' typical response to fall facedown before God when the people would complain or otherwise rebel (**Numbers 16:4**). Moses realized that the people were not rebelling against him (or Aaron) but that they were rebelling against God himself.

Scripture Link:

Was there another time that some men put fire and incense in their censers and came before YHWH? **Leviticus 10** tells of what became of Aaron's two eldest sons when they did this.

Scripture Link:

It would appear from **Numbers 16:20-22** that God wanted to destroy the entire group of rebellious men. However, Moses and Aaron pleaded with Him not to destroy all of them because of the sin of just one man. This is similar to Abraham pleading with God not to destroy all of Sodom and Gomorrah if there were some innocent people there (**Genesis 18:22-25**).

d) What was Moses' response when Korah and the others confronted him? What plan did he propose to Korah and all his followers? Does this remind you of any past incident?

Moses fell face down before God. Moses instructed Korah and his followers to take censers and present fire and incense before God. (We know what happened to Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu when they did this.(Leviticus 10))

e) How did Moses respond specifically to Korah (verses 8-11)? Do you think Moses understood the real reason behind Korah's activities?

Moses addressed Korah as a Levite, reminding them that they perform a special role as representatives of God to the Israelites and vice versa. He pointed out that they were rebelling against God, not Aaron. Moses probably knew that Korah was jealous of Aaron's position as high priest.

f) What happened when Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram? Why do you think they refused to appear before Moses? About what were they complaining? To what "land flowing with milk and honey" were they referring in verse 13?

Dathan and Abiram refused to appear before Moses, an act of defiance. They clearly objected to Moses as a leader, blaming him for all their problems. They referred to Egypt as the land of milk and honey which they left under Moses' leadership and they had not received their promised inheritance.

g) What happened to Moses and Aaron the next day when Korah and all his followers gathered at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting? What did God say He wanted to do? How did Moses and Aaron respond? Does this remind you of any other incident?

God told Moses and Aaron to move away from the assembly so that He could destroy them at once. Moses and Aaron fell face down and begged God not to destroy the entire assembly when only one man had sinned. This is reminiscent of Abraham bargaining for the cities of Sodom & Gomorrah.

h) Describe what finally happened to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. What do you think happened to On? Do you think all of Korah's family was destroyed? (**Numbers 26:10-11**)

Moses told everyone to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The ground then opened up and swallowed them and their families. Since On is no longer mentioned, he may have repented and been spared. Numbers 26:10-11 indicates that not all of Korah's family was destroyed.

“. . . the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions.”

Numbers 16:32

i) What happened to the other 250 leaders who were presenting incense at the Tent of Meeting? What was done with their censers? Why was this done?

Fire came out from God (much like Nadab & Abihu) and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense to God. Aaron's son, Eleazar, took the censers from the remains and hammered them into sheets of bronze to overlay the altar of burnt offering as a reminder to the Israelites that no one except Aaron & his sons were to present incense before God.

j) According to verse 41, what happened the next day? Do you think the spirit of rebellion had been put to rest?

The next day the Israelites began to grumble against Moses and Aaron accusing them of killing those who had died. The rebellion was not over.

k) How did God respond to the situation? What did Moses and Aaron do? How was God's wrath stopped? What symbolism do you see here? How many people died?

Again God told Moses and Aaron to get away so that He could destroy the assembly, and again Moses and Aaron fell facedown to seek His forgiveness for the people. Moses instructed Aaron to hurry and take fire and incense to make atonement for the people as a plague had already started. Aaron stood between the people and averted God's wrath, much as Yeshua does for us.

The earth opened . . .

Can you imagine the impact that this event would have on those who saw it? Furthermore, the part that Moses played in this event should have left no doubt that he was God's chosen leader for the Israelites.

Why would the Israelites grumble the next day?

It appears that the seeds of the rebellion that Korah and his compatriots had sown in the camp were deep-rooted. By blaming Moses and Aaron for the deaths of the rebels, the people demonstrated how blind they were with God's role in the whole affair.

Scripture Links:

This is not the first time that God had threatened to destroy the entire Israelite community. In **Exodus 32:9-10** God also sought to destroy the Israelites. In both cases, however, Moses interceded on behalf of the people and God relented. This foreshadows the future work of the Messiah as the ultimate mediator between God and man (**1 Timothy 2:5**).

God purges the Rebellion

From Numbers 17:12-13, it appears that God had finally succeeded in removing the sin of rebellion from the community. One can assume that nearly 15,000 people had to die for their sin (**Numbers 16:49**).

Re-establishing the Priesthood

In this passage, God re-states His role for the Levites and for Aaron and his family in particular. He makes it clear that the priests alone are responsible for the care and functioning of the Tabernacle and all its furnishings. The rest of the Levites are under their authority, but the priests were responsible to assure that no unauthorized (or unclean) person came too near the Tent of Meeting and die.

2. The Budding of Aaron's Staff - 17:1-13

a) Describe the process that God commanded in verses 1-5. What was the purpose of this process? Why do you think God chose to do this at this time?

To show once and for all who God had chosen to be priest, He had a staff from each tribe inscribed with the leader's name placed before the Ark. The next day, the staff that budded would be God's choice.

b) What was the result when the process was followed? What was to be done with Aaron's staff? Why do you suppose the people responded as they did in verses 12-13?

Aaron's staff not only budded but produced almonds. God commanded that the staff be put in front of the Ark as a sign. It appears from verses 12-13 that the people finally realized it was God who had chosen their leaders.

3. Duties of Priests and Levites - 18:1-7

a) To whom is God speaking in this passage? What were Aaron and his family's responsibilities? What were the responsibilities of the other Levites? What would happen if they neglected these responsibilities?

Speaking only to Aaron, God reminded him that he and his sons bear the responsibility for offenses against the Tabernacle & the priesthood. The other Levites were to join and assist them in these duties, but they were not to go near the furnishing of the Tabernacle or they and Aaron's sons would die.

b) In verses 6-7, God says that He is giving Aaron and his family two gifts. What are they and why are these considered gifts? Is it clear who is to serve as priests?

The first gift mentioned is the gift of the Levites to help with the work of the Tabernacle. The second gift is the priesthood itself. It should be considered a gift to be of service to God. (See I Peter 2:9 and 5:2-3)

4. Offerings for Priests and Levites - 18:8-32

a) Verses 8-20 detail the parts of the offerings brought by the Israelites that are to belong to Aaron and his sons, the priests. Specifically what does God give to the priests?

Many of the prescribed offerings were not completely consumed by fire and the remaining parts belonged to the priests. This includes much of the fellowship offerings, the grain and drink offerings and other freewill offerings.

b) We know that the firstborn of every womb belongs to God. What was to be done with the firstborn of men and of unclean animals? What would be the result for the priests? By contrast, what was to be done with the firstborn of oxen, sheep, or goats?

The firstborn of men and unclean animals were to be redeemed for 5 shekels, a small amount of money (see Exodus 13:15 and 34:19). This was a source of money for the priests. The firstborn of oxen, sheep, or goats were sacrificed to God.

c) Verses 20-24 state that the Levites are not to have any inheritance in Israel. What was their share? How were they to support themselves without any land?

God Himself was the Levites' share of His inheritance. The Levites were to support themselves from the offerings given by the people.

d) According to verse 26, what were the Levites commanded to do with the tithe they received from the Israelites? To whom was their tithe presented? Can you draw any lessons from this for your own life?

Of the tithe the Levites received from the rest of the Israelites, they were to present a tenth of the best part to God as their offering. Verse 28 indicates that they were to give it to Aaron the priest (or his sons).

Scripture Links: Everlasting Covenant of Salt

The Salt Covenant is mentioned in **Exodus 30:34-38** and in **Leviticus 2:13**. The Israelites are instructed to include salt with all their offerings. It is thought that because of the nature of salt, this covenant is indestructible and remains in force over time.

No Inheritance

The land that God was giving to the Israelites was to be divided among the twelve tribes, **not** including the tribe of Levi. These other tribes would cultivate the land and make their living from it. The Levites, on the other hand, were to have sole and full-time responsibility to attend to God as priests and care-takers of the Tabernacle. It's clear from **verse 20** that God Himself was to be their share and inheritance among the Israelites.

Digging deeper

1. Korah's rebellion is a complex and interesting story. There are many lessons that can be learned from it. List as many of these lessons as you can, emphasizing those that are most meaningful to you.

Possible lessons include (a) God chooses leaders that we must submit to, (b) we should guard our hearts against jealousy of those in leadership positions, (c) we should not complain or undermine leadership in God's community, (d) a rebellious spirit is contagious, (e) when we rebel against God's ordained leadership, we are really rebelling against God. There are obviously many other possible lessons.

2. Chapter 17 basically reinforces that God chose Aaron (and his sons after him) to be the high priest. We know, however, that this is only a "type" of the priesthood of Yeshua. Chapters 4 -10 of the book of **Hebrews** treats this in some detail. Read these chapters and list some comparisons between the two priesthoods.

Some comparisons include (a) both Aaron (and his sons) and Yeshua were appointed by God as our priest, (b) both the priests and Yeshua stand between God and us as advocates for us, (c) both the priests and Yeshua offer sacrifices for atonement to turn away God's wrath, (d) while the priests offered up the blood and bodies of oxen, sheep, and goats, Yeshua offered up his own blood and body, (e) while the priests were required to continually offer up sacrifices as atonement for sin, Yeshua's sacrifice was offered up once and for all. Again, many other comparisons are possible.

For further study, see

Haftarah : 1 Samuel 11:14-12:22

Brit Hadashah : 2 Timothy 2:8-21; Jude 1-25