

Korah

Korah, the second son of Levi who was founder of one of the three great Levite families. His family was subdivided into the houses of Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel.

Korah was of the house of Izhar also a Kohathite, with his origin going back to Levi.

In the wilderness the Kohathites carried the tabernacle furniture and vessels [Numbers 10:21] as part of the duties of the tribe of Levi [Numbers 4:17-20, 34-37] the descendants of Aaron [Joshua 21:4; 1 Chronicles 6:54], skilled in playing instruments [2 Chronicles 34:12] and listed as sacred musicians [Psalms 42:49, 84, 85, 88].

Korah was one of the influential people during the exodus, among the leaders of Israel in Egypt. [Exodus 6:21]

With this background Korah was **not** without prestige in Israel, but was **not** content with the position he had been given.

Numbers 16:1-2 [NIV] *“Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council.”*

Korah used his popularity to influence others to support his fight for a position of greater authority.

Korah and his associates had seen the possible advantages of priesthood in Egypt. Egyptian priests had great wealth and political influence, something that Korah wanted for himself.

Korah may even have assumed that Moses, Aaron and his sons were trying to make the Israelite priesthood the same kind of political machine and he wanted to be part of it.

Korah did **not** understand that Moses' main ambition was to serve God rather than control other people.

Numbers 16:3 [NIV] *“They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, ‘You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD’s assembly?’”*

Three grounds for this revolt are stated:

- 1) Moses and Aaron had set themselves above the rest of Israel. [verses 3, 13]
- 2) Moses had failed to bring Israel to the Promised Land. [v14]
- 3) Moses and Aaron had arrogated the priesthood to themselves.

Numbers 16:4 [NIV] *“When Moses heard this, he fell face down.”*

Moses prostrated himself in entreaty to God for he recognised the offence was grievous.

Numbers 16:5-7 [NIV] *“Then he said to Korah and all his followers: ‘In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will make that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him. You, Korah, and all your followers are to do this: Take censers and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before the LORD. The man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!’”*

Moses rightly passed judgement of this problem over to God to resolve, Who only can look into the minds of humans to see what motivates their actions. [**Psalm 139:1-4**]

Numbers 16:8-11 [NIV] *“Moses also said to Korah, ‘Now listen, you Levites! Isn’t it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the LORD’s tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?’”*

Moses saw through their charge to their true motivation, some of the Levites wanted the authority of the priesthood.

Like Korah we sometimes desire the special qualities that God has given to others.

Numbers 16:12-14 [NIV] *“Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab. But they said, ‘We will not come! Isn’t it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? Moreover, you haven’t brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!’”*

The rebellion of Korah had spread to others, now in open hostility to the authority that God had given Moses.

Numbers 16:15 [NIV] *“Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, ‘Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them.’”*

This was an example of righteous anger where God’s own authority was being challenged.

Numbers 16:16-18 [NIV] *“Moses said to Korah, ‘You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow, you and they and Aaron. Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it, 250 censers in all, and present it before the LORD. You and Aaron are to present your censers also.’ So each man took his censer, put fire and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.”*

The means of testing as to where God-given authority resided was set up and agreed by all involved.

Numbers 16:19-20 [NIV] *“When Korah had gathered all his followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the glory of the LORD appeared to the entire assembly. The LORD said to Moses and Aaron,”*

God’s presence was very visible to all.

Numbers 16:20-21 [NIV] *“The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Separate yourselves from this assembly so that I can put an end to them at once.’”*

We do **not** know if all present heard this command from God. If they did, it must have put terror into the minds of all who backed up Korah at that time.

Numbers 16:22 [NIV] *“But Moses and Aaron fell face down and cried out, ‘O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?’”*

Both Moses and Aaron showed the true quality of spiritual leaders to intercede on behalf of those they had authority over, knowing they had responsibility for their welfare as well.

Numbers 16:23-27 [NIV] *“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the assembly, ‘Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.’” Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. He warned the assembly, ‘Move back from the tents of these wicked*

men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.' So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents."

The judgement of God was also the response to the prayer of His faithful servant Moses.

But notice that families of the men in rebellion were **not** separated from the men who were head of the family. [**Exodus 20:5-6; Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:7-10**]

This shows just how important the right example of a father is to the welfare of his children.

These men had given a bad example to their children, one of rebellion against God-given authority. [**Romans 13:1-5**]

Numbers 16:28-30 [NIV] *"Then Moses said, 'This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt.'"*

The proof of where God's authority lay.

Numbers 16:31-34 [NIV] *"As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, 'The earth is going to swallow us too!'"*

A very powerful example for all of Israel.

Numbers 16:35-40 [NIV] *"And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense. The LORD said to Moses, 'Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to take the censers out of the smouldering remains and scatter the coals some distance away, for the censers are holy, the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives. Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the LORD and have become holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites.' So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers brought by those who had been burned up, and he had them hammered out to overlay the altar, as the LORD directed him through Moses. This was to remind the Israelites that no-one except a descendant of Aaron should come to burn incense before the LORD, or he would become like Korah and his followers."*

God did **not** ignore the rebellious sin of the additional 250 leaders in the community who also took on themselves a task that was only for the priests to perform, the descendants of Aaron.

Numbers 16:41-50 [NIV] *"The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 'You have killed the LORD's people,' they said. But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned towards the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the LORD said to Moses, 'Get away from this assembly so that I can put an end to them at once.' And they fell face down. Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started.' So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for the plague had stopped."*

This shows how the rebellious actions of one leader of a nation can spread far and wide throughout the nation, like a plague.

Korah's story gives us numerous personal warnings –

- 1) Don't let desire for what someone else has make you discontented with what you already have.
- 2) Don't try to raise your own self-esteem by attacking someone else's.
- 3) Don't use part of God's Word, selective verses from the Christian Bible, to support what you want rather than allowing the whole of the Christian Bible to mould us into what God wants us to be. [**2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 12:2; Hebrews 4:12**]
- 4) Don't expect to find satisfaction in power and position, for it is very likely that God wants to use us in the position we are in life now. [**Acts 4:13; Exodus 4:10-16**]
- 5) Our spiritual accomplishment is totally dependent on what God chooses to do in and through us. [**John 15:5**]
- 6) There is a fine line between goals and greed.
- 7) If we are discontent with what we have, we may lose it without gaining anything else.