

Qorah / Korah (A Levite)

Commentary Y3-09

Numbers 16:1-50 1 Samuel 11:1-15 (No Psalm) Jude 1-25
Numbers 16:1 – 17:15 in Hebrew Bibles

Iyyar 29, 5763 / May 31, 2003
Iyyar 29, 5766 / May 27, 2006
Iyyar 29, 5769 / May 23, 2009
Iyyar 27, 5762 / May 19, 2012

Today is Ascension Day!

For fifty days, from the Passover to Firstfruits, the future bride is maturing and counting the days.

"Blessed are You, Yahweh our God, ruler of the universe, Who has sanctified us by His Word, and instructed us to count the omer. Today is the forty-second day of the Omer. It is the sixth week of the Omer." – Lev 23:15-16

Reader 1* Amen. ¹ Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, ² and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. ³ They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Yahweh is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of Yahweh?" ⁴ When Moses heard this, he fell on his face; ⁵ and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning Yahweh will show who is His, and who is holy, and will bring him near to Himself; even the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself. ⁶ "Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and all your company, ⁷ and put fire in them, and lay incense upon them in the presence of Yahweh tomorrow; and the man whom Yahweh chooses shall be the one who is holy. You have gone far enough, you sons of Levi!"

Reader 2* Amen. ⁸ Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi, ⁹ is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of Yahweh, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them; ¹⁰ and that He has brought you near, Korah, and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking for the priesthood also? ¹¹ "Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against Yahweh; but as for Aaron, who is he that you grumble against him?" ¹² Then Moses sent a summons to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come up. ¹³ "Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also lord it over us? ¹⁴ "Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

Reader 3* Amen. ¹⁵ Then Moses became very angry and said to Yahweh, "Do not regard their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them." ¹⁶ Moses said to Korah, "You and all your company be present before Yahweh tomorrow, both you and they along with Aaron. ¹⁷ "Each of you take his firepan and put incense on it, and each of you bring his censer before Yahweh, two hundred and fifty firepans; also you and Aaron shall each bring his firepan." ¹⁸ So they each took his own censer and put fire on it, and laid incense on it; and they stood at the doorway of the tent of meeting, with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹ Thus Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the doorway of the tent of meeting. And the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the congregation.

Reader 4* Amen. ²⁰ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²¹ "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly." ²² But they fell on their faces and said, "O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" ²³ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'" ²⁵ Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him, ²⁶ and he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin." ²⁷ So they got back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the doorway of their tents, along with their wives and their sons and their little ones.

Reader 5* Amen. ²⁸ Moses said, "By this you shall know that Yahweh has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing. ²⁹ "If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, then Yahweh has not sent me. ³⁰ "But if Yahweh brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned Yahweh." ³¹ As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and

they perished from the midst of the assembly.³⁴ All Israel who were around them fled at their outcry, for they said, "The earth may swallow us up!"

*Reader 6** Amen.³⁵ Fire also came forth from Yahweh and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.³⁶ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying,³⁷ "Say to Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, that he shall take up the censers out of the midst of the blaze, for they are holy; and you scatter the burning coals abroad."³⁸ "As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered sheets for a plating of the altar, since they did present them before Yahweh and they are holy; and they shall be for a sign to the sons of Israel."³⁹ So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as a plating for the altar,⁴⁰ as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no layman who is not of the descendants of Aaron should come near to burn incense before Yahweh; so that he will not become like Korah and his company-- just as Yahweh had spoken to him through Moses.

*Reader 7** Amen.⁴¹ But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of Yahweh's people."⁴² It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of Yahweh appeared.⁴³ Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting,⁴⁴ and Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying,⁴⁵ "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly." Then they fell on their faces.⁴⁶ Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from Yahweh, the plague has begun!"⁴⁷ Then Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people.⁴⁸ He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked.⁴⁹ But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah.⁵⁰ Then Aaron returned to Moses at the doorway of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been checked.

1 Samuel 11

*Reader 8** Amen.¹ Now Nahash the Ammonite came up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us and we will serve you."² But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "I will make it with you on this condition, that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you, thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel."³ The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Let us alone for seven days, that we may send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to deliver us, we will come out to you."⁴ Then the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and spoke these words in the hearing of the people, and all the people lifted up their voices and wept.⁵ Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen, and he said, "What is the matter with the people that they weep?" So they related to him the words of the men of Jabesh.⁶ Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry.⁷ He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen." Then the dread of Yahweh fell on the people, and they came out as one man.⁸ He numbered them in Bezek; and the sons of Israel were 300,000, and the men of Judah 30,000.

*Reader 9** Amen.⁹ They said to the messengers who had come, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh-gilead, 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you will have deliverance.'" So the messengers went and told the men of Jabesh; and they were glad.¹⁰ Then the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you."¹¹ The next morning Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp at the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.¹² Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is he that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death."¹³ But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today Yahweh has accomplished deliverance in Israel."¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, "Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there."¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before Yahweh in Gilgal. There they also offered sacrifices of peace offerings before Yahweh; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

(No Psalm)

Jude

*Reader 10** Amen. ¹ Jude, a bond-servant of Yeshua the Messiah, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Yeshua the Messiah: ² May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.

³ Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. ⁴ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Yeshua the Messiah.

⁵ Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, ⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. ⁸ Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.

⁹ But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

*Reader 11** Amen. ¹⁰ But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

¹² These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; ¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. ¹⁴ It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." ¹⁶ These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.

*Reader 12** Amen. ¹⁷ But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, ¹⁸ that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." ¹⁹ These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on some, who are doubting; ²³ save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. ²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Yeshua the Messiah our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Commentary:

Numbers 16

Korah was a firstborn son of Izhar – a Levite. Dathan, Abiram, and On were descendants of Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob / Israel, whom God replaced with Levi.

¹ Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben (*the firstborn of Jacob*), took action, ² and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. ³ They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Yahweh is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly (*qahal: synagogue, church*) of Yahweh?"

Num 12:3 -- (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)

Previously, the people had complained about various supposed "needs", such as food, or water, or a different kind of leader. We need to see how we are naturally like these people. But in today's portion, the problem is that other Levites wish to usurp Moses' position. This also is a serious kind of problem in our religious organizations today.

Ibn Ezra: "Aaron and his sons were designated to replace the firstborn as the only ones who would perform the sacrificial service. This angered Korah, who himself was a firstborn (see Exodus 6:21), and it was easy for him to enlist two hundred and fifty leaders of the assembly, who were also firstborn. Dathan, Abiram, and On were from the tribe of Reuben, which had its own reason for resentment, having lost its privileged firstborn status to the offspring of Joseph (see Genesis 48:5)." Other Levites may have been upset at having been relegated to be mere assistants of the Kohanim.

Ramban: "Korah's rebellion took place after the incident of the spies, because the people were resentful of the decree that everyone over twenty would die in the Wilderness. Korah's own resentment began earlier, when Aaron was made Kohen Gadol (see v.10), or when their cousin Elizaphan son of Uzziel was placed in charge of the Kohathite family (3:30), thus making him Korah's superior, and giving him a position Korah felt should have been his."

Today, we have multitudes of people who say that God has called them to preach, and that they have the Holy Spirit – giving them the ability to discern truth. However, the majority does not have the least basic understanding of the Bible, but proclaim their own ideas, or the ideas of their teachers – and these "Holy-Spirit-led" people can't even agree between themselves. God said: "*If they speak not according to this Word – the Torah and its attestation – it is because there is no light in them*" – Isaiah 8:20. In other words, a preacher who puts himself above Moses, is in the place of Korah! The same is true for those who put themselves above Yeshua, of whom Moses prophesied: "A prophet . . . like me, unto Him you shall hearken" – Deuteronomy 18:15.

(V.4) Moses had made intercession when the people worshipped the golden calf, when they complained without justification, and when they believed their spies rather than God.

Now, Moses fell on his face; then, he told Korah and company that God would show, in the morning, whom He had chosen for His own (the Levites who replaced the firstborn), and whom He had made holy (the Kohen Gadol had been chosen by God; it was not up to Moses or Korah). Moses appealed in various ways for the rebels to acknowledge God, but they stubbornly refused.

Lessons here for us are: we should appeal for leaders to acknowledge God, and we should pray for those who are misled.

(V.6) In Leviticus 10, after fire from Yahweh had burned the offerings presented by Aaron, Nadab and Abihu brought offerings with their own fire, and then fire from Yahweh came forth and consumed Nadab and Abihu. So also now, this incense offering will be used to show whom God has chosen.

(V.12) Dathan and Abiram dared refer to Egypt in the terms God used for the Promised Land: "flowing with milk and honey" (v.13), and accused Moses of bringing the people out to die in the Wilderness. They refused Moses'

summon, saying “We shall not go up”, and God ultimately brought their words to pass in their destruction, for they descended alive into the pit (v.33): they said they would not go up as God instructed, so God had them go down!

Though the initial rebellion was limited to Korah and a group of distinguished leaders, they spread doubt among the congregation. Note that causing others to sin is even worse than one’s own sin.

Moses then summoned Aaron as well as Korah and company to offer incense, so that God could distinguish between them. Korah then had all the congregation gather at the Tabernacle.

Then Yahweh’s glory appeared to all the congregation, and He told Moses and Aaron to get away so that He could destroy the congregation in an instant. But Moses and Aaron interceded for the congregation, after which Yahweh told Moses to get the people away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Moses told the congregation that they would now see that God was making the choices; it was not of Moses’ desire or doing.

The earth opened beneath Korah and his followers, swallowing them up with their families. Then, as previously with Nadab and Abihu, fire from Yahweh came forth and consumed the two-hundred-fifty who were offering incense.

(V.17:6) The next day the entire congregation complained that Moses and Aaron had killed God’s people! Once again, God told Moses and Aaron to get away, and the people would be consumed in an instant. And, again, Moses and Aaron made intercession. But a plague was gone out – from the presence of Yahweh! – and fourteen-thousand people died before Aaron could take his fire-pan and stand between the dead and living.

We could note here, that there was about a mile distance between the Tabernacle and the first camps, and then the camps spread for several miles. There were several million people in these camps. Aaron had to run perhaps a couple of miles to get between the living and those already dead!

Jude

(V.10-11) We continually are rebuked by those who do not undertake to learn and understand Scripture, but promote their own feelings for doctrine. *“These men speak evil of things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they . . . perish in the rebellion of Korah.”*

(V.24-25) *“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Yeshua the Messiah our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”*