

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

NUM. 16:23 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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:

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.

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.

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*.

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

NOTES

Judgment on the Rebellion

Lesson Text: Numbers 16:23-35

Related Scriptures: Numbers 16:15-22, 36-50; Psalm 16:1-11

TIME: about 1443 B.C.

PLACE: Desert of Paran

GOLDEN TEXT—"Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust" (Psalm 16:1).

Lesson Exposition

THE LORD WARNS MOSES— Num. 16:23-24

God was clearly angry with Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the other rebels for rising up not only against Moses and Aaron but against the Lord Himself. God had repeatedly shown the people that Moses was His chosen representative and that He had a unique relationship with Moses.

Since the rebel leaders would not go to Moses, Moses would go to them. Answering Moses' request not to kill all the people, God instructed him to tell the people to get away from the places where Korah, Dathan, and Abiram lived.

MOSES WARNS THE PEOPLE— Num. 16:25-30

Moses goes to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:25-26). With the elders of Israel in tow, Moses went directly to Dathan and Abiram. Their stubborn refusal to go to him as he had instructed led Moses to go to them.

When Moses and the elders reached Dathan and Abiram, he immediately told all the people to get away from the tents of these men and not touch any of their belongings. These men were under God's wrath, and any contact

with them or their possessions put a person at great risk of God's judgment.

Dathan and Abiram appear at their tents (Num. 16:27-28). The people wasted no time in moving away from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

After the people scattered, Dathan and Abiram came to the door of their tents.

The two men stood defiantly in opposition to Moses, along with their wives and children. Korah probably did the same at his nearby tent.

Moses stood before Dathan and Abiram and boldly declared that God was with him and had sent him to lead Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. The charge made by the rebels against Moses was that he had assumed control on his own.

Of course, any charges they made against Moses along these lines was also an accusation against God.

Moses was not afraid to stand before anyone, whether it be three rebels or the entire congregation of Israel, and publicly state that the Lord had sent him to do all the things he had done.

Moses announces a severe test (Num. 16:29-30). Moses declared before the people that if Korah, Dathan,

and Abiram died as men commonly died—that is, by natural causes—it would mean the Lord had not called him. However, if they died in a very unique way—namely, by the ground suddenly opening up and swallowing them alive and taking them down into “the pit” (Heb. *sheol*)—this would clearly demonstrate that God had sent him and that these men had despised the Lord.

GOD JUDGES THE REBELS— Num. 16:31-35

Deaths of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:31-32). What happened next is one of the most dramatic events ever recorded in human history. In vivid demonstration that the Lord was with Moses and had sent him, the ground split apart underneath Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. They fell into the crevice, along with all their possessions and those people who stood with them.

Swallowed alive (Num. 16:33-34). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram all fell into the opening in the earth and plunged to their deaths, as evidenced by the statement that they went down into the pit. “Pit” translates the Hebrew word *sheol*, which refers to the place of the dead.

The people of Israel witnessed these men plunge to their deaths as objects of God’s divine wrath for orchestrating a rebellion against Him. Their motives and actions were not only an offense against God but also very dangerous to the people. So while the Lord’s actions might at first appear quite severe to some, we can see why such drastic action on His part was necessary. The rebellion had to be squelched.

The Israelites scattered in an effort to find secure ground. Fear and panic set in quickly as everyone fled in an attempt to avoid suffering the same fate as the three rebels and their households.

This occurrence cannot be dismissed as a natural event such as an

earthquake that coincidentally happened at this particular moment. For one thing, it took place just as Moses had said just minutes before. For another, when the ground breaks apart in an earthquake, it does not repair itself. In this incident, the ground closed back up once the guilty parties had fallen into the opening.

Death of the 250 (Num. 16:35). Back at the tabernacle, fire came forth from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who had joined with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in this insurrection God punished their rebellion.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. Who went with Moses to approach Dathan and Abiram?
2. What did Moses tell the people to do in regard to these two men?
3. What did Moses warn concerning anyone who stood with the rebels or touched any of their belongings?
4. How would the people know that God had sent Moses?
5. What happened to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram immediately after Moses finished speaking?
6. What does the Hebrew word *sheol* refer to?
7. Why was it necessary for God to deal with this rebellion in such a drastic way?
8. How did the people respond when they saw God judge the men?
9. Why can this event not be written off as a natural phenomenon such as an earthquake?
10. What happened to the 250 men who joined Korah in the rebellion?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. When we stand up for what is right, we can trust those who are loyal to the Lord to stand with us (Num. 16:23-25).
2. If we collaborate with sinners, we are likely to become guilty in our actions (vs. 26).
3. Those closest to us often suffer the most for our sins (vs. 27).
4. If we seek God's will, He will make it evident to us (vss. 28-30).
5. A person only has so long to turn to the Lord, then comes judgment; this should give us an urgency in evangelism (Num. 16:31-33; cf. Heb. 9:27).
6. We should maintain a healthy fear of the Lord so we will be reverent and have a greater view of His mercy toward us (Num. 16:34-35; Matt. 10:28).

—Megan Hickman.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is it so important to have unified leadership within the church?
2. Can you have close relationships with unbelievers? How can you evangelize people without making them feel like "projects"?
3. Should we attempt to appeal to the world by being like the world? Why or why not?
4. Are natural disasters always judgments from God against wickedness? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever known someone who has died young? How does this affect your motivation to evangelize?

—Megan Hickman.

Golden Text Illuminated

"Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust" (Psalm 16:1).

The golden text for this week provides a much-needed positive perspective to balance the severity of the judgment recorded in this week's lesson text. It is a prayer of David expressing abiding confidence in the Lord's goodness and provision for His people. Psalm 16 also famously contains lines that were cited by Peter in his sermon as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection (cf. Acts 2:25-31; Ps. 16:8-11).

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram decidedly did not put their trust in the Lord as David did. They were preoccupied with challenging Moses' God-anointed authority.

In this cause, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were immovable in their stubborn determination. They refused to cooperate or listen to Moses' warnings against their petitions.

The consequence of their persistence in this incorrigible rebellion was that the Lord caused the earth beneath their feet to open up like the yawning maw of some gigantic beast and swallow them all alive—their wives, their children, and even their houses with all their belongings. Not only that, but the 250 men who were employed to offer incense for the rebels were consumed by fire.

The plea for preservation in our golden text is imperative when we consider what it means to be found on the wrong side of redemptive history. Yes, our God is abounding in love, mercy, patience, and forgiveness, but only to those who take refuge in Jesus Christ.

—John Lody.