

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

NUM. 16:1 Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*:

2 And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

3 And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, *Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?*

4 And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face:

5 And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who *are* his, and *who is* holy; and will cause *him* to come near unto him: even *him* whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.

6 This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company;

7 And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be *that* the man whom the LORD doth choose, he *shall be* holy: *ye take* too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.

8 And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi:

9 *Seemeth it but* a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

10 And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

11 For which cause *both* thou and all thy company *are* gathered together against the LORD: and what *is* Aaron, that ye murmur against him?

12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up:

13 *Is it* a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?

14 Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up.

NOTES

Korah's Rebellion

Lesson Text: Numbers 16:1-14

Related Scriptures: Deuteronomy 11:1-7; Psalm 106:16-18

TIME: about 1443 B.C.

PLACE: Desert of Paran

GOLDEN TEXT—"Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway" (Deuteronomy 11:1).

Lesson Exposition

KORAH REBELS AGAINST MOSES—Num. 16:1-3

The rebels assemble together (Num. 16:1-2). In this week's lesson we see a new group of insurrectionists rising up against God's appointed leaders.

The leader of this latest insurrection was a man named Korah, a Levite who was the grandson of Kohath.

Allied with Korah were Dathan, Abiram, and On, all of whom were Reubenites, descendants of Jacob's eldest son, Reuben. Since the Reubenites and Kohathites both camped close together on the southside of the camp (2:10; 3:29), it is easy to see how men from these two groups would have conversed and conspired together.

Together, these men assembled a group of 250 others to join them in their rebellion. They were not just a random collection of men from the people; they were all respected chiefs and leaders.

Charges made against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:3). After gathering his collection of rebellious cohorts together, Korah and his fellow insur-

gents approached Moses and Aaron.

This large coalition led by Korah accused Moses and Aaron of going too far in exerting their authority.

MOSES CONFRONTS THE REBELS—Num. 16:4-11

Moses and Korah (Num. 16:4-5). When Moses realized he was going to have to deal with yet another rebellion, he fell on his face in front of his accusers. This was not a position of weakness or surrender, but of grief and mourning. Moses knew this meant trouble for the guilty parties.

Moses did not defend himself but appealed to the Lord. He did not get into a shouting match with Korah or the others; he simply stated that the Lord would make it known who His leaders were.

Challenge to the challengers (Num. 16:6-7). Moses was a very humble man (cf. 12:3), yet he was confident that the Lord would defend him. He instructed Korah and his entire company to take censers with fire in them and bring them before the Lord the very next morning.

Moses stood firm against the chal-

lenge of Korah and his company as he returned the words they had used against him, telling them they had taken “too much” upon them—they had gone too far (vs. 7; cf. vs. 3).

Reminder of privilege (Num. 16:8-9). Moses specifically called out the sons of Levi who had joined Korah in this rebellion.

Charge of rebellion (Num. 16:10-11). Moses reminded them that their appointed service had brought them near to God. They encamped near the tabernacle, and their service brought them into frequent contact with it. They were literally close to the earthly presence of God manifested in the tabernacle.

Moses asked the challengers specifically why they were grumbling against Aaron. These Levites were upset that Aaron had been chosen from among all the Levites to be the high priest and that only his sons and future descendants could serve as priests.

THE REBELS ACCUSE MOSES— Num. 16:12-14

Dathan and Abiram reject Moses (Num. 16:12). Dathan and his brother Abiram represented the Reubenite contingent in the rebel coalition. These two refused to come before Moses when called to do so.

Dathan and Abiram accuse Moses (Num. 16:13-14). The depravity in the hearts and minds of the two Reubenite brothers is further exemplified in their specific choice of words in describing Egypt. They asserted that Moses had led them out of a land flowing with “milk and honey,” which was exactly how God had described Canaan (cf. Ex. 3:8). Their use of this phrase was a deliberate insult and challenge to the Lord.

To further their case against him, Dathan and Abiram accused Moses of

making himself a prince over the people of Israel. Their complaint was that Moses gloried in his authority and superior position.

To make matters even worse, Dathan and Abiram then asserted that Moses wanted to “put out the eyes of these men” (Num. 16:14). This is probably a figure of speech, similar to when we speak of “pulling the wool” over someone’s eyes. Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On, and the other 250 men clearly had an agenda. They opposed Moses for personal reasons.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. Who was the leader of the rebellion against Moses, and who joined him?
2. What two tribes were involved in the rebellion against Moses and Aaron?
3. What did the rebels accuse Moses of doing?
4. Why did Moses fall on his face?
5. How did Moses respond to Korah’s dispute about Israel’s true leadership?
6. What did Moses tell Korah and his men to do the very next morning?
7. What privileges did Korah and the other Levites already enjoy?
8. What did the Levites have against Aaron, and what role were they seeking?
9. Why was Dathan and Abiram’s description of Egypt a direct insult to the Lord?
10. Of what did Dathan and Abiram first accuse Moses?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Just because people have charisma does not mean you should follow them (Num. 16:1-2).
2. We must not be jealous of other people's roles in the church. God has a meaningful role for each of us (vs. 3).
3. If someone wrongly accuses you, respond with humility, and let the Lord provide a defense (vss. 4-7).
4. We should always be thankful for the ways that God uses us (vss. 8-10).
5. There is often no reasoning with people who are set on rebellion, but we must try to help them see their error (vss. 11-12).
6. When God does not meet our expectations, we must have faith that His plans are good (vss. 13-14).

—Megan Hickman.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How have you dealt with people using their influence for their own selfish ambitions?
2. What factors should you consider before rebuking others for misusing their power?
3. Why is it so hard to be humble in the face of accusations? Is it wrong to be upset when injustice is done to you?
4. Do you struggle with the ways in which God wants to use you in the body of Christ (cf. I Cor. 12:14-18)?
5. What should the church do if someone is not playing their proper role in the body?

—Megan Hickman.

Golden Text Illuminated

“Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway” (Deut. 11:1).

Our golden text today is the opposite of the subject of our lesson text. The exact problem presented by Korah's rebellion is that he and his fellow conspirators did not by any means make loving the Lord and keeping His statutes their priority. Rather, Korah and his comrades cared more about promoting their own political status and calling into question Moses' leadership.

Korah, for some reason, decided that this would be an opportune time to once again challenge Moses' position as Yahweh's chosen leader of the people.

It is important to note Moses' reaction to Korah's challenge: “When [he] heard it, he fell upon his face” (Num. 16:4). Moses' first reaction was to humble himself before the Lord.

Moses told Korah and his comrades that, on the next day, the Lord Himself would decide this conflict. He urged them to prepare censers with fire and incense to meet with the Lord. But he also warned them that it would likely not go well for them. Sometimes the Lord takes us through especially hard times, either to chastise us or to purify us from sin or both. It is not easy to submit when the prospects for our future look bleak and painful. But rebellion only makes matters worse. The only way to react is with humility and submission to the Lord.

—John Lody.