

### God's Judgment of Those Involved in the Rebellion of Korah

#### Numbers 16:25-50

**Numbers 16:25-50** - *"Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. <sup>26</sup> And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins."<sup>27</sup> So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.*

*<sup>28</sup> And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. <sup>29</sup> If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. <sup>30</sup> But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD."*

*<sup>31</sup> Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, <sup>32</sup> and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. <sup>33</sup> So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit, the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. <sup>34</sup> Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!"*

*<sup>35</sup> And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense.*

*<sup>36</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>37</sup> "Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. <sup>38</sup> The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel."<sup>39</sup> So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, <sup>40</sup> to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.*

*<sup>41</sup> On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD."<sup>42</sup> Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. <sup>43</sup> Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting.*

*<sup>44</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>45</sup> "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces.*

*<sup>46</sup> So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun."<sup>47</sup> Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people.*

<sup>48</sup> *And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.* <sup>49</sup> *Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident.* <sup>50</sup> *So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.*”

## Background Notes

Here’s a little prayer that someone gave me a few weeks ago: *“Dear Lord; So far today I’ve done all right. I haven’t gossiped or lost my temper. I haven’t been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I’m really glad about that. But in a few minutes, I’m going to get out of bed, and from then on I’m probably going to need a lot more help. Amen.”*

We may laugh at that “prayer,” because we all can identify with the experience expressed in it - right? In actuality, however, committing these sins is a serious matter, because these sins are surface symptoms of deeper problems.

Behind the surface sin of **complaining**, there is the deeper sin of **discontent**. Behind the surface sin of **criticism**, there is the deeper sin of **jealousy**. Behind the surface sin of **compromise**, there is the deeper sin of **unbelief**. In Numbers 16, we see that behind the surface sin of **contempt**, there is the deeper sin of **rebellion**. We’ve called these sins “the sins of the wilderness,” because these sins kept Israel wandering in the wilderness. These sins kept the entire generation that left Egypt from attaining everything that God had for them in the Promised Land!

These “sins of the wilderness” are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10: *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (v11-12) So we should study the book of Numbers, because the sins of the wilderness are recorded here as a warning for us. We all need to remember - *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”*

If you ever think that you’ve “arrived” in the Christian life, and that now you’re a spiritual giant and God’s gift to the Church, **watch out!** One of these sins will get you for sure! Take the sin of rebellion, for example. I’m familiar with situations in which godly Christian men and women got caught up in a movement to remove and replace God-given leaders in a church. And guess what? Grumbling and criticism about the way the church leaders carried out the services or programs in the church, and then contempt shown toward the leaders is the way the rebellion got started. **Be warned! “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”**

## Doctrinal Points

## 1. God removes believers who persist in the sin of rebellion.

Verses 33- 34: *“So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.”* [The pit (*sheol*) means the grave.] *“Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up also!”*

How fast would you have run, if you had been one of the Israelites at that time? I think we'd have moved out **very** quickly as we saw the earth opening up and the judgment of God falling upon Korah and his fellow-rebels!

Whenever I read the account of Korah's rebellion and the earthquake, I'm reminded of one of our family devotions a number of years ago. When our children were growing up, every so often they would take turns in leading our family devotions. When it was our son David's turn, he would always build biblical models and tell the story. He always picked Bible accounts of cataclysmic events – the global Flood, the Egyptian army drowning in the Red Sea, the falling of the walls of Jericho, and so on! Well, I will never forget when he did the rebellion of Korah! He built a model, had an earthquake split the earth and swallow up the toy people, and when the earth snapped shut, I can still picture how the arms and legs of the toy people wiggled as they were extruding from the crushed earth! (As I recall, it was hard to have the family settle down for prayer time after that!)

On a more serious note, we certainly see our doctrinal point illustrated in the earthquake and the fire that followed Korah's rebellion. God removes believers who persist in the sin of rebellion – both then and today. 1 John 5:16 warns about “a sin leading to death” - for believers! What is that sin? It could be any sin that a believer continues to commit to the point where God must discipline that believer with death.

Although the discipline of death is God's judgment, it also demonstrates God's grace. Wouldn't you agree that it's better to go home to Heaven early, rather than to live on in continued sin, and do further damage in your home and in your church?

So there is the sin that leads to death for believers, and death may be God's discipline for persistent and rebellious sin. In Numbers 16, rebellion against God's chosen leaders and God's authority structures is an example of a sin that can lead to death. Watch out for **the telltale sign of contempt of God's leaders.**

God removes believers who persist in the sin of rebellion.

## 2. God reminds believers of the consequences of the sin of rebellion.

In verses 36-40, why did the Lord command the bronze metal of the improperly used censers to be hammered out and used as plating for the bronze altar? Answer: The Lord commanded this action so that the flattened censers would be a constant reminder to the people of the consequences of the sin of rebellion. Every time the people brought sacrifices and looked at that altar, they would be reminded that God must judge the sin of rebellion.

In the same way, when we rebel against authority, God will “hammer out” the situation in ways that will cause His people to remember that **there are consequences to the sin of rebellion!** For example, consider a Christian family in which the husband has not loved his wife as Christ loved the Church (Ephesians 5), or the wife has not honored her husband as the head of the household (Ephesians 5), or the teenagers have not obeyed and honored their parents (Ephesians 6). We can all see the obvious sad consequences. It’s like the plating on the altar - the obvious “hammered-out” consequences will remind God’s people of the seriousness of rebellion against the commands of God. God reminds believers of the consequences of the sin of rebellion.

## Practical Application

### Thank the Lord that He stands between the dead and the living!

On the **very next day** after the earthquake, the children of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and blamed them for causing the death of the rebels (v41)! Can you believe it? God had to judge the grumbling people with a plague -- and 14,700 more people died. What a lesson for us! How soon we forget the warnings and examples God has provided for us in His Word – examples to help us avoid sin.

The good news here is that the plague was stopped before everyone died. As Aaron, the high priest, took his censer with incense and fire from the altar and made atonement for the people, he stood between the dead and the living -- and the plague was stopped (v48). What a wonderful picture of Christ as our High Priest. He stands between the dead and the living!

If you’re not a Christian, you have no priest to bridge the gap between you and God, because the Lord Jesus Christ is not your High Priest. You are still *“dead in your sins”* (Ephesians 2:1). However, if you’re a believer, you have been delivered from the deadly consequences of sin and you are now in the company of the living because of the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Now He lives forever to make intercession for us as our High Priest (Hebrews 7:25).

Have you ever thanked the Lord for that great truth? Be sure to thank the Lord Jesus that He stands between the dead and the living!