

**Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**  
**Bible Study Notes**  
**11-17-21**  
**Numbers 16**

**The Accusation Against Moses And Aaron - Verses 1-3**

<sup>1</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup> and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. <sup>3</sup> 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?”

**16:1-3** Korah and his associates had seen the advantages of the priesthood in Egypt. Egyptian priests had great wealth and political influence, something Korah wanted for himself. Korah may 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 a part of it. He did not understand that Moses’ main ambition was to serve God rather than to control others.

**The Response Of Moses To Korah And His Company - Verses 4-11**

<sup>4</sup> When Moses heard this, he fell facedown. <sup>5</sup> 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 have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him. <sup>6</sup> You, Korah, and all your followers are to do this: Take censers <sup>7</sup> and tomorrow put burning coals 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!” <sup>8</sup> Moses also said to Korah, “Now listen, you Levites! <sup>9</sup> 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? <sup>10</sup> He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. <sup>11</sup> It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?”

**16:8-10** Moses saw through their charge to their true motivation—some of the Levites wanted the power of the priesthood. Like Korah, we often desire the special qualities God has given others. Korah had significant, worthwhile abilities and responsibilities of his own. In the end, however, his ambition for more caused him to lose everything. Inappropriate ambition is greed in disguise. Concentrate on finding the special purpose God has for you instead of wishing you were in someone else’s shoes.

## **Dathan And Abiram Speak For The Rebels - Verses 12-14**

**<sup>12</sup> Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab. But they said, "We will not come! <sup>13</sup> Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you also want to lord it over us! <sup>14</sup> Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you want to treat these men like slaves<sup>(b)</sup>? No, we will not come!"**

**16:13-14** One of the easiest ways to fall away from following God is to look at our present problems and exaggerate them. Dathan and Abiram did just that when they began to long for better food and more pleasant surroundings. Egypt, the place they had longed to leave, was now looking better and better—not because of slavery and taskmasters, of course, but because of its mouthwatering food! These two men and their followers had completely lost their perspective. When we take our eyes off God and start looking at ourselves and our problems, we begin to lose our perspective as well. Overrating problems can hinder our relationship with God. Don't let difficulties make you lose sight of God's direction for your life.

## **Moses Restates His Challenge - Verses 15-19**

**<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow—you and they and Aaron. <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> So each of them took his censer, put burning coals and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>19</sup> 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.**

**16:15** Then Moses was very angry, and said to the LORD: After the words of Dathan and Abiram, Moses was angry - very angry. He knew he has done nothing to deserve such an accusation, and he did the right thing - he left the situation to God.

**16:15-19** Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD: This specified the challenge. God would approve or disapprove of these 250 men gathered with censers of incense before the door of the tabernacle.

God used the censers with fire and incense in this test for a good reason. A censer is a metal pot used to burn incense, and they were used in the priestly worship of God. Since Korah and his companions questioned Moses and Aaron's right to lead the nation and conduct the priesthood, each group would come to the LORD as worshipping priests - and God would show which group He accepted.

## **God Announces Judgment On The Rebels - Verses 20-21**

**<sup>20</sup> The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>21</sup> "Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."**

**16:20-21** Separate yourselves: It is as if God said, "Moses and Aaron, will you please move away? I'm going to destroy all these rebels in an instant, and I don't want you to get hurt."

That I may consume them in a moment: God decided to make His choice immediately evident. Sometimes this is not the case when God deals with modern Korahs and their followers.

## **The Intercession Of Moses And Aaron For Korah And The Rebels - Verse 22**

**<sup>22</sup> But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and cried out, "O God, the God who gives breath to all living things, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?"**

**16:22** Then they fell on their faces: This was amazing love from Moses and Aaron. Undoubtedly, one of God's reasons for allowing such a painful event in the life of Moses was that God wanted to see this kind love drawn out of Moses. Perhaps it was only the prayer of Moses and Aaron can spare the lives of these men who have tried to bring them down. Such love for the undeserving shows that Moses and Aaron were growing in love, and being transformed into the image of Jesus - before Jesus ever walked the earth.

Shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation: Moses and Aaron saw right through it. Though many were involved (at least more than 250), one man was at the center of it all - Korah. His sin, his drawing of a group after himself, was the cause of all this mess.

## **God's Judgment On The Rebels - Verses 23-26**

**<sup>23</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>24</sup> "Say to the assembly, 'Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'" <sup>25</sup> Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. <sup>26</sup> 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."**

**16:26** The Israelites were told not even to touch the belongings of the wicked rebels. In this case, doing so would have shown sympathy to their cause and agreement with their principles. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were directly challenging Moses and God. Moses clearly stated what God intended to do to the rebels (16:28-30). He did this so that everyone would have to choose between following Korah or following Moses, God's chosen leader. When God asks us to make a fundamental choice between siding with wicked people or siding with him, we should not hesitate but commit ourselves to be 100 percent on the Lord's side.

## God's Judgment On The Rebels - Verses 27-35

<sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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: <sup>29</sup> If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. <sup>30</sup> 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 realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt." <sup>31</sup> As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart <sup>32</sup> and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah, together with their possessions. <sup>33</sup> They went down alive into the realm of the dead, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. <sup>34</sup> At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, "The earth is going to swallow us too!" <sup>35</sup> And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

**16:27-28** By this you shall know: God gave Moses supernatural insight to know some special judgment (a new thing) was going to come upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The earth would swallow them up, as evidence that these men have rejected the LORD. The ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up: This was just the way Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were destroyed - along with their families. We may be uneasy seeing the families destroyed also, but it clearly shows that the families of the rebellious, divisive, contentious people suffer also - often greatly.

**16:35** A fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men: God had judgment reserved for those who walked in agreement with Korah, though not as horrific as the judgment Korah himself received. Their worship was not received.

## A Bronze Covering For The Altar - Verses 36-40

<sup>36</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>37</sup> "Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to remove the censers from the charred remains and scatter the coals some distance away, for the censers are holy— <sup>38</sup> 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." <sup>39</sup> So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers brought by those who had been burned to death, and he had them hammered out to overlay the altar, <sup>40</sup> 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.

**16:36** Pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy ... let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar: The censers were beaten flat and used to cover the main altar

of sacrifice. The censers of the rebels were holy and preserved because even though Korah and his followers worshipped wrongly, they worshipped the right God.

**16:36-40** Scatter the fire some distance away: The fire was not holy and was to be scattered away. It was a strange fire - not acceptable to the LORD at all.

They were hammered out as a covering on the altar, to be a memorial to the children of Israel: The censers were thus memorialized and served as an important reminder. God appoints His leaders, and no one should be a divisive rebel like Korah.

### **The People Murmur Against Moses And Aaron - Verse 41**

**41** The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the LORD's people," they said.

**16:41** Just one day after Korah and his followers were executed for grumbling and complaining against God, the Israelites started all over with more muttering and complaining. Their negative attitude only caused them to rebel even more and to bring about even greater trouble. It eroded their faith in God and encouraged thoughts of giving up and turning back. The path to open rebellion against God begins with dissatisfaction and skepticism, then moves to grumbling about both God and present circumstances. Next comes bitterness and resentment, followed finally by rebellion and open hostility. If you are often dissatisfied, skeptical, complaining, or bitter—beware! These attitudes lead to rebellion and separation from God. Any choice to side against God is a step in the direction of letting go of him completely and making your own way through life.

### **The Threat Of Judgment On The Children Of Israel For Their Sympathy For Korah - Verses 42-45**

**42** But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the tent of meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. **43** Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the tent of meeting, **44** and the LORD said to Moses, **45** "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once." And they fell facedown.

**16:42-45** Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment: God reacted the same way towards the sympathizers as He did towards Korah and his company. Evidently, these people deserve to be judged.

And they fell on their faces: This humble, desperate reaction showed that they took the threat of judgment seriously. They understood that it was no small thing to sympathize with a divisive, contentious person. God takes it seriously, and so should we.

## Aaron's Intercession Stops The Plague Of Judgment Upon The Children Of Israel - Verses 46-50

<sup>46</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with burning coals from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started." <sup>47</sup> 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. <sup>48</sup> He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. <sup>49</sup> But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. <sup>50</sup> Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the tent of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

**16:46** 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: God had promised judgment in Numbers 16:45 (that I may consume them in a moment). Therefore, Moses told Aaron, as the high priest over God's people, to immediately offer incense to make atonement for the congregation.

**16:47** Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly: Moses and Aaron might have had an interest in letting God consume all those who sympathized with those who rebelled against their leadership. Instead, out of love, they tried to stop the plague. We have no reason to think that Korah or his group would have shown the same mercy to Moses. They probably would have passively said, "Well God, go ahead and give them what they deserve. I knew they had it coming to them!" Korah and the complainers didn't have the same shepherd's heart for Israel that Moses and Aaron did.

**16:47** So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people: A censer filled with burning incense was used to stop the plague. Incense is a picture of prayer in the Bible (as in Revelation 8:3-4), because the sweet-smelling smoke of incense ascends to heaven as our prayers would. This was a dramatic picture of Aaron, as high priest, interceding for God's people. And he stood between the dead and the living, so the plague was stopped: The plague stopped where Aaron prayed. Intercessors do the same thing today; they stand between the dead and the living, beseeching God's mercy, preserving and promoting life with their prayer.

**16:48** To stand between the dead and the living speaks of how serious the matter of prayer is; it is no casual pursuit, no fatalistic exercise in self-improvement. Prayer moves the hand of God, and moves it to stop death and to give life! When was the last time we prayed as if life and death depended upon it?

**16:49-50** Those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred: This is a great number, but not compared to the consuming of the whole nation. Even now, the generation of unbelief was perishing in the wilderness, so a new generation of faith and boldness could be raised up to take the Promised Land. Most importantly, Aaron the high priest's work here is a picture of our high priest Jesus, and his work on our behalf. We were guilty sinners deserving judgment, we were rightly plagued, our Savior was sent on His mission, He was unjustly accused and attacked, He prayed on our behalf, He "ran" to save us, He stood between death and life for us, and He is the only chance for salvation, being the dividing line between death and life.