

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Numbers

Lesson #10, Chapter 16

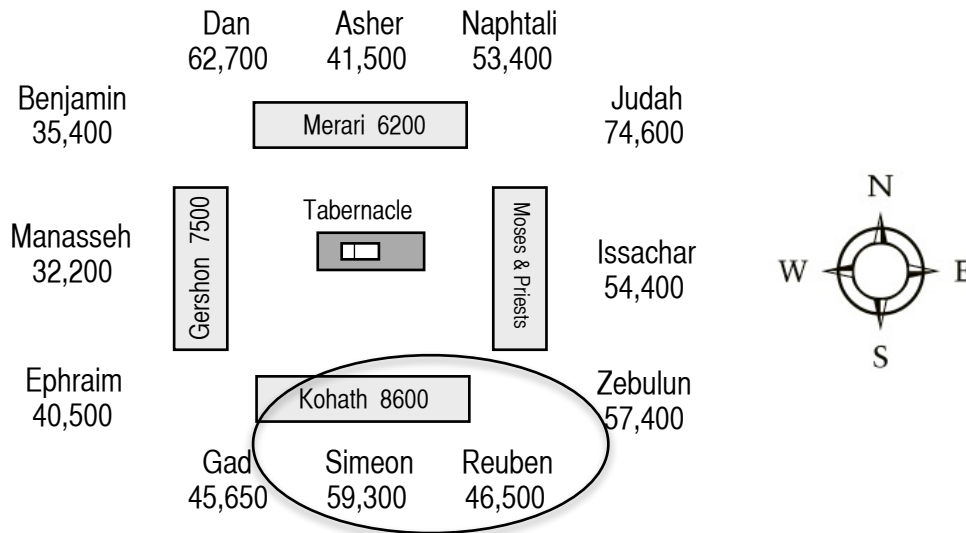
Numbers Chapter 16 - Korah's Rebellion

Numbers 16:1 (NLT) One day Korah son of Izhar, a descendant of Kohath son of Levi, conspired with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben.

Korah was a cousin of Moses and Aaron. He was a Kohathite, which means that he was a descendant of Kohath, a son of Levi. As a Levite, he was chosen by God to be of help to the priests as they performed their sacred duties.

Dathan and Abiram were sons of Eliab. In Numbers 26:5-8 we are told that Eliab was a great-grandson of Reuben. On was also of the tribe of Reuben.

As we look at the camp layout below, we see that the Kohathites and the Reubenites camped close together. Korah, the instigator of the drama that we will read about in this chapter, found those near him of a like mind.



Numbers 16:2 They incited a rebellion against Moses, along with 250 other leaders of the community, all prominent members of the assembly. **3** They united against Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far! The whole community of Israel has been set apart by the Lord, and he is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than the rest of the Lord's people?"

Israel was guilty of complaining many times before this. Here are some examples:

Exodus 15:22 (NLT) Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea.... **23** When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink...

24 Then the people complained and turned against Moses. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded.

Exodus 16:1 Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai... **2** There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron.

3 "If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."

Exodus 17:1 At the Lord's command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. **2** So once more the people complained against Moses. "Give us water to drink!" they demanded.

Exodus 32:1 When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. "Come on," they said, "make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt."

Numbers 11:1 Soon the people began to complain about their hardship, and the Lord heard everything they said. Then the Lord's anger blazed against them, and he sent a fire to rage among them, and he destroyed some of the people in the outskirts of the camp...

4 Then the foreign rabble who were traveling with the Israelites began to crave the good things of Egypt. And the people of Israel also began to complain. "Oh, for some meat!" they exclaimed. **5** "We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted. **6** But now our appetites are gone. All we ever see is this manna!"

Numbers 12:1 While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because he had married a Cushite woman. **2** They said, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he spoken through us, too?" But the Lord heard them.

Numbers 14:1 Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night. **2** Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!" they complained. **3** "Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn't it be better for us to return to Egypt?" **4** Then they plotted among themselves, "Let's choose a new leader and go back to Egypt!"

If we look closely at their complaints we see:

The people complained of thirst (Exodus 15:24, 17:1).

The people complained of hunger (Exodus 16:3).

The people were impatient (Exodus 32:1).

The people complained of hardship (Numbers 11:1).

The foreigners among them craved the "good things of Egypt"(Numbers 11:4).

The people craved the "good things of Egypt" (Numbers 11:4b-6).

Moses' relatives challenged Moses' authority (Numbers 12:1).

The people complained and were fearful of having to fight their enemies
(Numbers 14:1-4).

Now we see complaining that has taken on a new form. Not only is there general unrest among the people, but now we see a ringleader - Korah - who unites with likeminded leaders in Israel against Moses.

Paul writes to the church and warns that the failings of Israel in the wilderness are an example to us in this present age:

1 Corinthians 10:1 (NKJV) Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, **2** all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, **3** all ate the same spiritual food, **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. **5** But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. **7** And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." **8** Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; **9** nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; **10** nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. **11** 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.

Let's continue in Numbers 16:

Numbers 16:2 (NLT) They incited a rebellion against Moses, along with 250 other leaders of the community, all prominent members of the assembly. **3** They united against Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far! The whole community of Israel has been set apart by the Lord, and he is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than the rest of the Lord's people?"

Korah took a portion of truth and twisted it. Yes, the whole community had been set apart by the Lord. Read what they were told earlier:

Exodus 19:1 Exactly two months after the Israelites left Egypt...they came to the wilderness of Sinai and set up camp there at the base of Mount Sinai.

3 Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: **4** 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. **5** Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. **6** And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.'"

If the Israelites would obey God they would be God's special treasure and a kingdom of priests to God. There was a certain element of "priest" in all of them if they would keep God's covenant. However, God placed Moses as their deliverer from Egypt, their messenger (telling them God's words to them), and their leader towards the Promised Land. He also placed Aaron as High Priest. Aaron was it, and since Aaron would not live forever, the office of priest would go to Aaron's descendants that followed so Israel would always have priests. These were offices that could not be filled by just anyone in Israel. Only one could be a deliverer from Egypt and bring God's word to the people (Moses). Only priests could stand before the people to offer sacrifices for atonement or offer incense to God.

Taking this same principle into our day, Christians are elevated by God for His purposes:

1 Peter 2:5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

9 ...for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

10 "Once you had no identity as a people;
now you are God's people.
Once you received no mercy;
now you have received God's mercy."

Just as *Moses and Aaron were God's gifts* to the people to deliver them, lead them, and offer sacrifices for them, *Jesus Christ was given by God* to us to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin, to deliver us from sin, and to lead us to a place of victorious living in Christ.

In our story there were these divisions as follows:

Moses, and Aaron the high priest (along with Aaron's sons, the priests)
The Levites (assisting the priests)
The congregation

The Levites were God's gift to the congregation. God stated that all the firstborn sons of Israel were His. But in God's kindness, the congregation did not have to send their oldest sons to Aaron to help him with the duties of the Tabernacle. Instead, God allowed the entire tribe of Levi to be given in service to Aaron and his sons *in the place of* the firstborn sons of Israel. Read the following:

Numbers 3:5 Then the Lord said to Moses, **6** "Call forward the tribe of Levi, and present them to Aaron the priest to serve as his assistants. **7** They will serve Aaron and the whole community, performing their sacred duties in and around the Tabernacle... **9** Assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons. They have been given from among all the people of Israel to serve as their assistants. **10** Appoint Aaron and his sons to carry out the duties of the priesthood. But any unauthorized person who goes too near the sanctuary must be put to death."

11 And the Lord said to Moses, **12** "Look, I have chosen the Levites from among the Israelites to serve as substitutes for all the firstborn sons of the people of Israel. The Levites belong to me, **13** for all the firstborn males are mine. On the day I struck down all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, I set apart for myself all the firstborn in Israel, both of people and of animals. They are mine; I am the Lord."

The Levites were different from the congregation in that they were not going to inherit land, but each tribe would set aside a certain part of their land for them. The Levites would be supported by the tithes of the people. In turn, they would serve the priests in the Tabernacle.

Moses and Aaron were also God's gift to the people. They are each an Old Testament type of Jesus Christ. The New Testament says:

Hebrews 3:1 And so...think carefully about this Jesus whom we declare to be God's messenger and High Priest. **2** For he was faithful to God, who appointed him, just as Moses served faithfully when he was entrusted with God's entire house.

3 But Jesus deserves far more glory than Moses, just as a person who builds a house deserves more praise than the house itself. **4** For every house has a builder, but the one who built everything is God.

5 Moses was certainly faithful in God's house as a servant. His work was an illustration of the truths God would reveal later. **6** But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God's entire house. And we are God's house, if we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ.

Hebrews 4:14 So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe.

Hebrews 5:4 And no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was. **5** That is why Christ did not honor himself by assuming he could become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God... **8** Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. **9** In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him.

In the Old Testament, God gave the Levites to the congregation to serve the priests. In the New Testament:

Ephesians 4:11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. **12** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

In the rebellion of Korah, we see certain of the Levites and certain leaders from the congregation uniting together to oppose Moses and Aaron:

Numbers 16:3 They united against Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far! The whole community of Israel has been set apart by the Lord, and he is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than the rest of the Lord's people?"

God had called Moses and Aaron and placed them where He wanted them for His purposes. They were a blessing to all the congregation. Yet, this group of complainers (who were a part of the leadership of Israel) would not recognize this and be thankful. Instead, they were jealous.

Numbers 16:4 When Moses heard what they were saying, he fell face down on the ground. **5** Then he said to Korah and his followers, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show us who belongs to him and who is holy. The Lord will allow only those whom he selects to enter his own presence. **6** Korah, you and all your followers must prepare your incense burners. **7** Light fires in them tomorrow, and burn incense before the Lord. Then we will see whom the Lord chooses as his holy one. You Levites are the ones who have gone too far!"

8 Then Moses spoke again to Korah: "Now listen, you Levites! **9** Does it seem insignificant to you that the God of Israel has chosen you from among all the community of Israel to be near him so you can serve in the Lord's Tabernacle and stand before the people to minister to them? **10** Korah, he has already given this special ministry to you and your fellow Levites. Are you now demanding the priesthood as well? **11** The Lord is the one you and your followers are really revolting against! For who is Aaron that you are complaining about him?"

There could only be one Moses and Aaron, and there is only one Jesus Christ who is our Savior and High Priest. God appointed Moses and Aaron for them, and God appointed the man Christ Jesus for us. There is no use opposing Him - we will only be put in our place. There is no use opposing the foundation laid by the apostles, or those that God has placed in the church for edification.

Numbers 16:12 Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they replied, "We refuse to come before you! **13** Isn't it enough that you brought us out of Egypt, a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us here in this wilderness, and that you now treat us like your subjects? **14** What's more, you haven't brought us into another land flowing with milk and honey. You haven't given us a new homeland with fields and vineyards. Are you trying to fool these men? We will not come."

When people become rebellious they lose all sense of reality. In their minds they call black white and white black. Their memories of slavery in Egypt have been warped by a rebellious mind.

Numbers 16:15 Then Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, "Do not accept their grain offerings! I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, and I have never hurt a single one of them." **16** And Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers must come here tomorrow and present yourselves before the Lord. Aaron will also be here. **17** You and each of your 250 followers must prepare an incense burner and put incense on it, so you can all present them before the Lord. Aaron will also bring his incense burner."

Only the priests could burn incense. Aaron alone was authorized to burn incense to God in a censer on the Day of Atonement, one of Israel's holy days. Aaron was to fill his incense burner with coals from the altar, put the prescribed incense in it, and take it into the holy place behind the veil (Leviticus 16:12). The cloud of incense was to cover the mercy seat so Aaron would not die as He approached it on behalf of the entire nation. While behind the veil, he was to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat. He is a type of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, who alone approached that heavenly Tabernacle with His own blood. Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us (the burning of incense is a type of prayer and intercession). Only Jesus' intercession on our behalf is perfect and in the will of God. See Romans 8:26 & 34, Hebrews 7:25.

Numbers 16:18 So each of these men prepared an incense burner, lit the fire, and placed incense on it. Then they all stood at the entrance of the Tabernacle with Moses and Aaron. **19** Meanwhile, Korah had stirred up the entire community against Moses and Aaron, and they all gathered at the Tabernacle entrance. Then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to the whole community, **20** and the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, **21** "Get away from all these people so that I may instantly destroy them!"

22 But Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground. "O God," they pleaded, "you are the God who gives breath to all creatures. Must you be angry with all the people when only one man sins?"

23 And the Lord said to Moses, **24** "Then tell all the people to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."

25 So Moses got up and rushed over to the tents of Dathan and Abiram, followed by the elders of Israel. **26** "Quick!" he told the people. "Get away from the tents of these wicked men, and don't touch anything that belongs to them. If you do, you will be destroyed for their sins." **27** So all the people stood back from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Then Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the entrances of their tents, together with their wives and children and little ones.

28 And Moses said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things that I have done—for I have not done them on my own. **29** If these men die a natural death, or if nothing unusual happens, then the Lord has not sent me. **30** But if the Lord does something entirely new and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all their belongings, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have shown contempt for the Lord."

31 He had hardly finished speaking the words when the ground suddenly split open beneath them. **32** The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the men, along with their households and all their followers who were standing with them, and everything they owned. **33** So they went down alive into the grave, along with all their belongings. The earth closed over them, and they all vanished from among the people of Israel. **34** All the people around them fled when they heard their screams. "The earth will swallow us, too!" they cried. **35** Then fire blazed forth from the Lord and burned up the 250 men who were offering incense.

36 And the Lord said to Moses, **37** "Tell Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to pull all the incense burners from the fire, for they are holy. Also tell him to scatter the burning coals. **38** Take the incense burners of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, and hammer the metal into a thin sheet to overlay the altar. Since these burners were used in the Lord's presence, they have become holy. Let them serve as a warning to the people of Israel."

God's holiness is not only seen in the righteous acts of God's people, but it is also seen in the wrath of God upon rebellion and wickedness. One way or another, God's holiness will be made manifest.

These common incense burners are now holy because they were brought into the Lord's presence. They were going to be hammered down and the metal was going to be used on the altar of incense. It was to be a warning, should any unauthorized person go into the holy place to offer incense again.

39 So Eleazar the priest collected the 250 bronze incense burners that had been used by the men who died in the fire, and the bronze was hammered into a thin sheet to overlay the altar. **40** This would warn the Israelites that no unauthorized person—no one who was not a descendant of Aaron—should ever enter the Lord's presence to burn incense. If anyone did, the same thing would happen to him as happened to Korah and his followers. So the Lord's instructions to Moses were carried out.

41 But the very next morning the whole community of Israel began muttering again against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the Lord's people!" **42** As the community gathered to protest against Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the Tabernacle and saw that the cloud had covered it, and the glorious presence of the Lord appeared.

43 Moses and Aaron came and stood in front of the Tabernacle, **44** and the Lord said to Moses, **45** "Get away from all these people so that I can instantly destroy them!" But Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground.

46 And Moses said to Aaron, "Quick, take an incense burner and place burning coals on it from the altar. Lay incense on it, and carry it out among the people to purify them and make them right with the Lord. The Lord's anger is blazing against them—the plague has already begun."

47 Aaron did as Moses told him and ran out among the people. The plague had already begun to strike down the people, but Aaron burned the incense and purified the people. **48** He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague stopped. **49** But 14,700 people died in that plague, in addition to those who had died in the affair involving Korah. **50** Then because the plague had stopped, Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the Tabernacle.

Aaron's rightful place as High Priest is seen at the last in this dramatic story. He takes the censer and stops the plague. Only he could do it.

Only Jesus Christ could stand between sinful, rebellious man and death. Only He is our great intercessor:

Hebrews 7:23 (NLT) There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. **24** But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. **25** Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

26 He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. **27** Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins. **28** The law appointed high priests who were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made the perfect High Priest forever.