

September 17th

DISTRUSTING GOD'S LEADERS

"Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

NUMBERS 16:1-3

"Power corrupts...absolute power corrupts absolutely." Ever heard that statement? It was written by Lord Acton in a letter that he wrote to Bishop Creighton that debated whether people in leadership should have the same level of moral standards as ordinary people (phrasefinder.com). Maybe Lord Acton was watching a Spider-man movie from the Marvel universe where Uncle Ben says, "With great power comes great responsibility." Either way, the statement comes from skepticism about the motivations of those in leadership over us. Why do people even want to lead? Is it to serve others or to be served? This conversation isn't a new one; it goes all the way back to the Book of Numbers. Here we have Moses again attacked (along with Aaron). What does God teach us here?

Iain Duguid points out in his commentary that there are two groups that are rebelling here in Numbers 16:1-40. The first group (Korah and the Levites) rebelled against Aaron and the priesthood, while Dathan, Abiram, and 250 chief Reubenites rebelled against Moses. Why did they rebel? They were jealous that these men were given a "higher" role than everyone else. The key truth here is that they are claiming something that is true (priesthood of all believers), but they are coming to a false conclusion about leadership. Their pride and jealousy cause them to overstep their boundaries. After all, God is the one that set up the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Duguid summarizes the source of the conflict well: "Their argument here is a classic case of a false conclusion constructed on a true premise." Indeed, God had set all of Israel up as equal in his eyes, but equality doesn't mean that God doesn't set up different roles and responsibilities for each person.

Even as they rebel, these men still show their true colors by coming back to a distrust in the promises of God. Observe what Dathan and Abiram say to Moses in verses 13 and 14: "Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us? Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards." They don't believe in God's promise to bring them to the Promised Land. In fact, they have conveniently forgotten that the people are to blame for not entering Canaan, not Moses and Aaron. They continue to walk in the way of forgetting God's promises and blaming others for it. They won't accept responsibility for their sin.

Men, this is a key reminder about God's role in calling His leaders. While it's a different narrative that occurs in the New Testament, God still calls men to be elders in the local church. This call doesn't raise them above other servants in the local church. Rather, it emphasizes what God describes in I Corinthians 12-13, that the Holy Spirit equips us all with different gifts to serve and encourage one another within the body of Christ. It's not about people possessing more talent. It's about our God who calls each one to a distinct purpose and a distinct role to make God famous. Each one is valuable because God gives it. What an amazing God that calls us to His unique purposes!

Spend some time praying for the men in your local church that they would serve the Lord with humility and wisdom as they serve God's people.

For Further Reading: Numbers 16:1-40

