

# BOOK OF NUMBERS

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Lesson 8: Chapter 16:1-40

The Korah Rebellion

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# The Opposition

## Korah

Ringleader of the rebellion

Son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi

- Firstborn son, same as Aaron
- First cousin to Moses and Aaron
- Under the authority of nephew, Eleazar

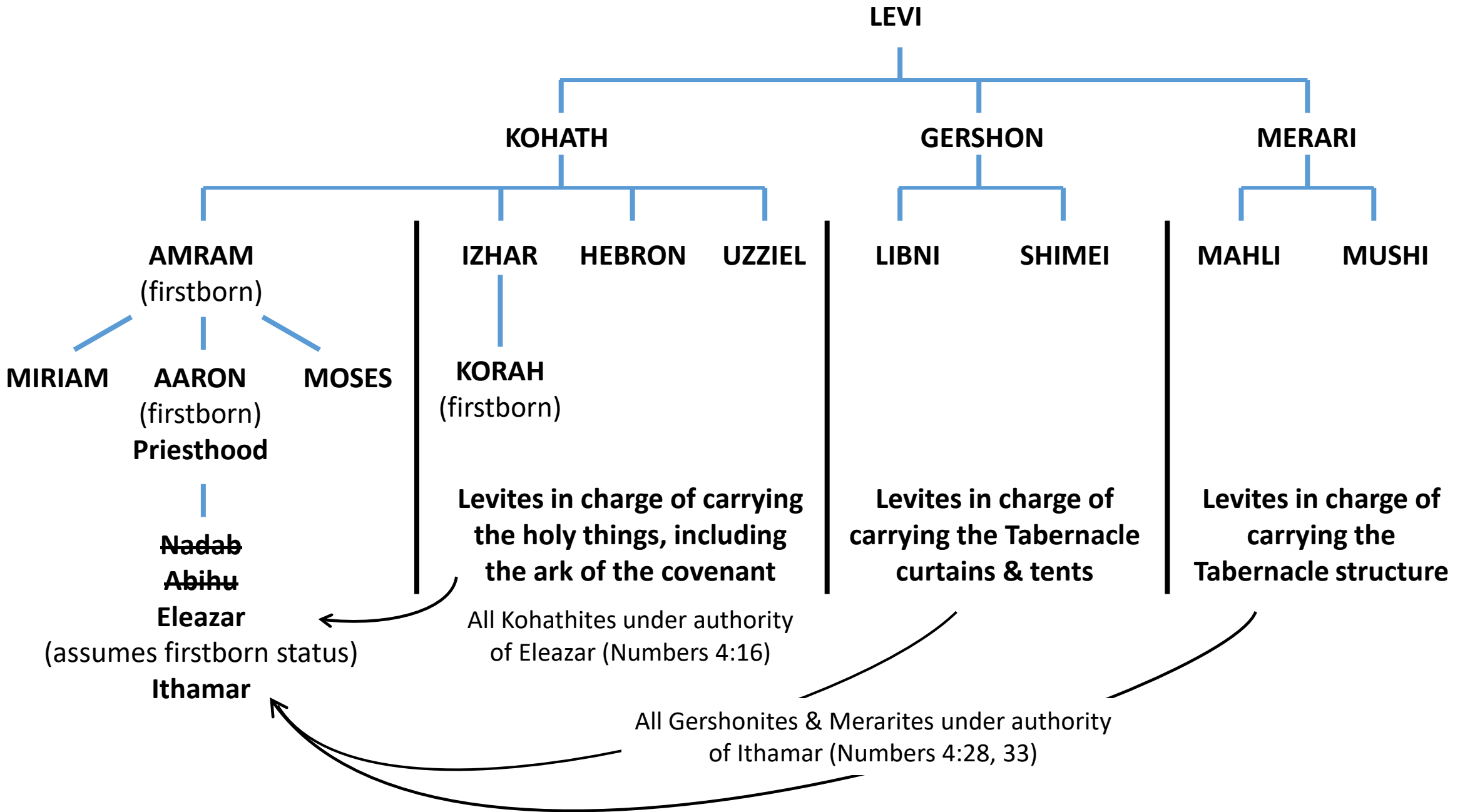
His grievance is with Aaron – he desires to be High Priest with his own priesthood (v10-11)

## 250 leaders from the tribes

- Representatives of the congregation – from the tribes (tribes not mentioned)
- Men of renown (v2) – men with reputations, men of name (yet they are unnamed)
- Hebrew: princes of the assembly
- Set themselves up to be a new priesthood with Korah

## Dathan and Abiram and On

- Sons of Eliab and Peleth, chiefs of the house of Reuben
- They join Korah because they have a grudge against Moses because as sons of Reuben, they should have the right to rule.
  - Reuben was the first-born son of Jacob – should have been ruler of all the tribes of Israel. He lost preeminence among the tribes when he lay with his stepmother, Bilhah.
  - Character flaw in the house of Reuben – challenging authority
  - The spy from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua, whose name meant “renown” as in to make a name for oneself by bringing desolation or doing something appalling. He brought a bad report of the Land and stood with those who challenged Moses’ authority.
  - Dathan and Abiram challenge Moses’ right to rule the camp



# The Charge

## Numbers 16:3. The rebels argument:

*Numbers 16:3 “They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You take too much upon yourselves [assume too much for yourselves], for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’”*

## Where does Korah get that idea of the whole congregation being holy?

- The seventy elders now have the same Spirit in them as Moses has. (Chapter 11)
- We are all a royal priesthood (Chapter 15)
- We are all called on to act as judges of one another now – to discern presumptuous sin from unintentional sin, and execute judgment accordingly (Chapter 15).

**Korah is making a judgment of Moses and Aaron.**

**What kind of sin is Korah accusing Moses and Aaron of?**

Moses and Aaron are being presumptuous

**What is the penalty for it?**

Being cut off from the people.

**If the charge proves to be false, what will happen to the accusers?**

(Deuteronomy 19:16-20)

## The Charge:

*“You take too much upon yourselves ... why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”*

### **How does the world choose leadership?**

By popularity, by vote (number),  
by birthright (of kings), by force

### **How is leadership chosen among God’s people by?**

God is King over all His people, and He decides what role each will play, and where their places are.

The right of leadership and authority does not belong to Moses and Aaron based on their holiness or ranking among their brethren, but by God’s will.

- The rebels are quick to point out that the Lord is among the people, but they ignore the fact that He is the authority over them. They don’t give Him His rightful place.
- They call themselves God’s people, but downplay a personal relationship with Him. They only see themselves in physical relationship to Moses and Aaron, and not in spiritual relationship to God.
- They have objectified God as being just a figurehead.

Squabbles arise among God’s people over status or place when God the King is cut out of the picture.

- God the King puts His people in their various positions and tasks
- He defines their freedoms and boundaries.
- No one has the right to challenge those boundaries, not even members of a royal priesthood.

Just because you are one of the royal priesthood doesn’t mean you can challenge authority. **1 Peter 2:9-17**

# The Charge

## Fleshly lust: coveting power

God doesn't lift us up that we should take power and glory over one another. He lifts us up that we might serve and glorify Him.

### What is at the heart of the rebels' complaint?

- They haven't acknowledged God as King over them.
- They are unhappy with the place they have been given among the Lord's people.
  - We have a Kohathite who would be high priest but isn't.
  - We have men who would be a priesthood but aren't.
  - We have men who would be kings but aren't.
- When they look at Moses and Aaron, they covet the power and glory.
- They set themselves up as equal to Moses and Aaron and therefore, able to take the leadership at will.

## Keep Perspective

Are these rebels going to enter the land?

Will a change in leadership change that reality?

What do they hope to accomplish by ousting Moses and Aaron?

Korah and Dathan and Abiram have said to themselves, "There is no hope of entering the kingdom, so we will be kings and priests within the limits of our world – this wilderness into which we have been cast."

That is a very satanic line of thinking. That is the same rationale driving Satan toward his end.

# Moses' reply to Korah & company

## Read Numbers 16:5-7. Moses' challenge:

Take censers, put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord. Let the Lord choose the holy ones.

The showdown will be tomorrow morning. You rebels have one night to think about it.

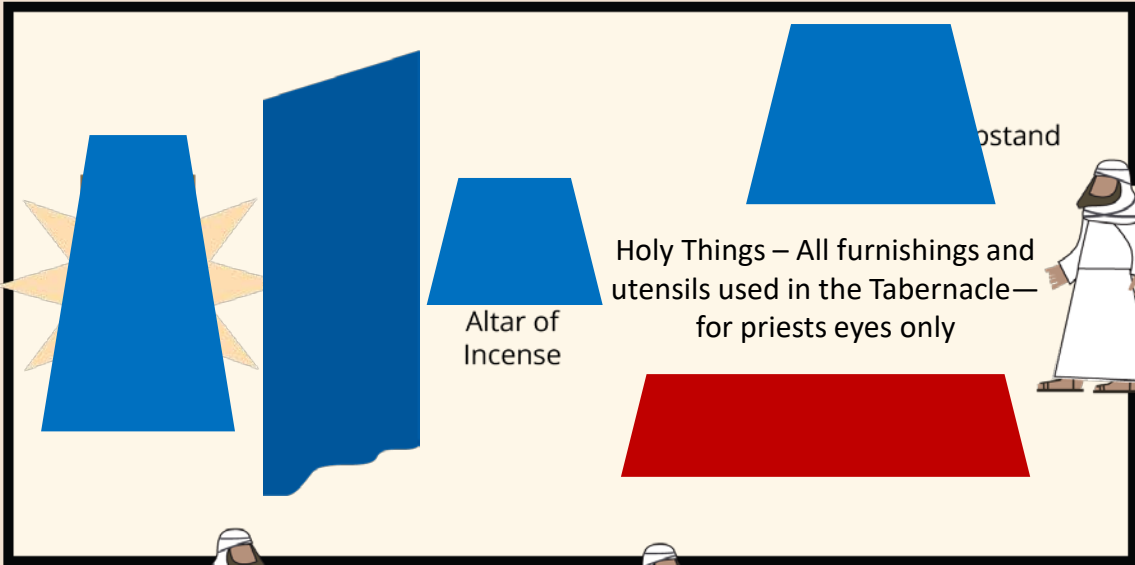
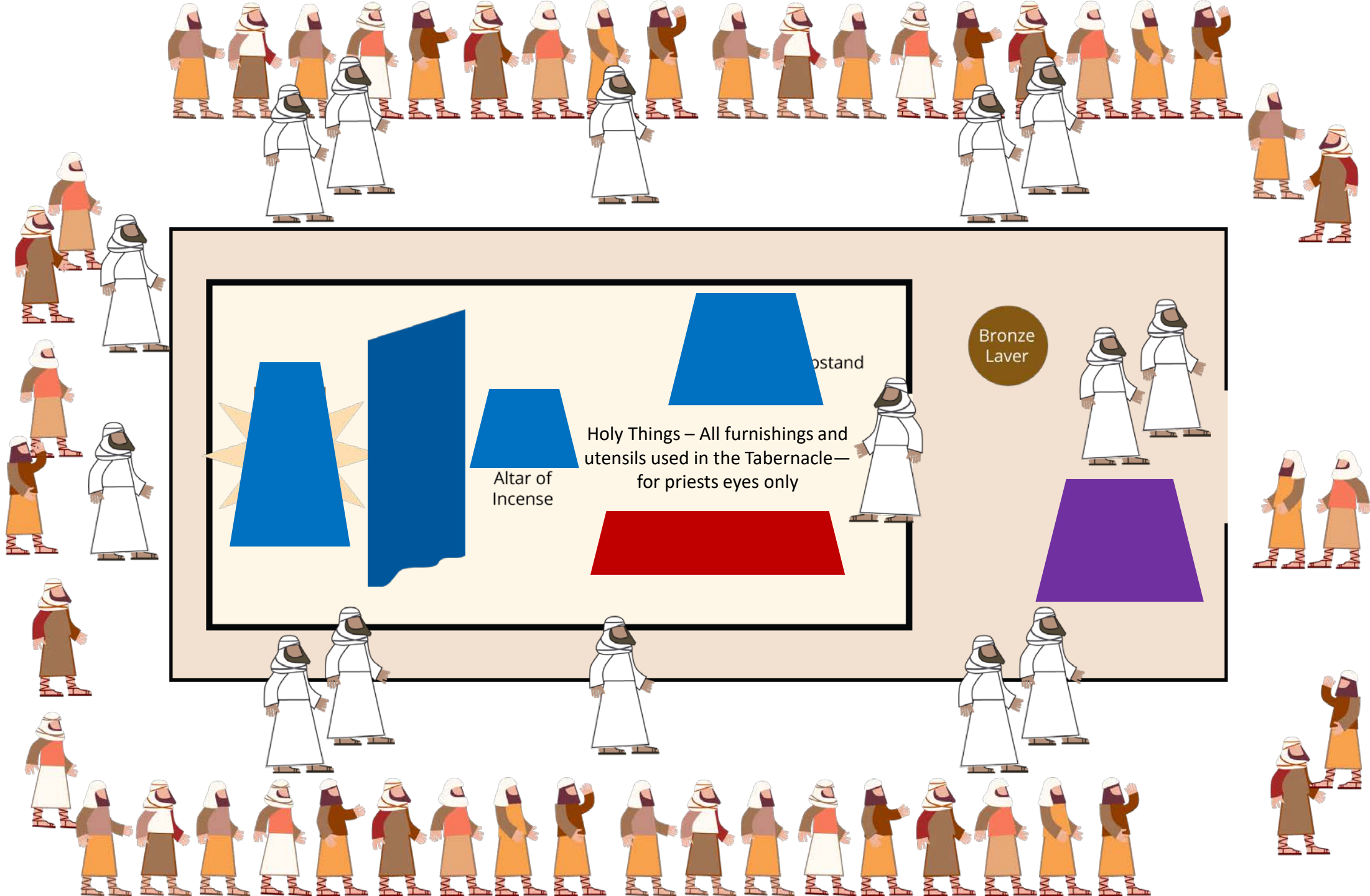
## Read Numbers 16:8-11. Moses addresses Korah personally

Is it a small thing...?

## What was Korah's role as a Kohathite? Read Numbers 4:4-20.

The Kohathites

- They are the burden bearers. When the children of Israel journey, Kohathites take charge of carrying the articles of the Tabernacle that have been wrapped in their coverings (v15)
- They cannot go into the Tabernacle to see the holy things (v20)
- They are allowed to approach but not touch the holy things, apart from their coverings (v15)
- They are accountable to Eleazar (v16) and the priesthood for keeping the holy things in their set apart status.
- Some Kohathites carry the ark that goes ahead of the children of Israel



Bronze Laver

Holy Things – All furnishings and utensils used in the Tabernacle— for priests eyes only

Altar of Incense

Lampstand



# Moses' exchange with Dathan and Abiram

## Read Numbers 16:12-15. Dathan & Abiram response

*“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 should keep acting like a prince over us?”*

- Who brought them out of the Egypt?
- Was it a small thing?
- Why are they comparing the Promised Land to Egypt as the land of milk and honey?
- And whose fault is it that everyone is going to die in this wilderness?
- Is the hope of entering the land and the inheritance lost forever?

*“Will you put out the eyes of these men?”* (meaning, will you have them follow you blindly).

- Is Moses the one who has blinded them and concealed the way to the Land from them?
- Who is suffering blindness at this point?

Dathan and Abiram have taken all the glory that should have gone to God, turned it into a bad thing and then blamed it all on Moses.

They have lifted themselves up in the eyes of the people, and determined to take the leadership from Moses.

They have used all the strategies that this world uses – they have made up an issue based on a skewed argument, false witness, and character assassination.

They have offered themselves as the better option, as the politically correct choice, backed by force.

## Moses' exchange with Dathan and Abiram

Have you ever had someone right there in your face, spouting untrue accusations about you?

What is the natural response to that?

**Moses' reaction (v15):**

*Then Moses was very angry [burn furiously, be incensed], and said to the LORD, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them."*

- Moses does not waste time arguing with fools. It's an absurd argument.
- He does not try to vindicate himself to other people who are listening.
- He lays the case before God and asks God for validation. Where you seek validation in moments like this will either give glory to God or take glory from God.
- Moses never demanded tribute as their leader. He never used his power to hurt them. Maybe if he had they would have respected him more. That is how leaders of this world demand respect.
- It is clear that these men have no respect for Moses, so Moses asks God not to respect their offering in return. (This offering is a freewill or tribute offering.) Sin against a brother is counted as unfaithfulness to God.
- He asks God to be his avenger, instead of taking vengeance for himself.

**Numbers 16:16-21**

**Armies of the North**

(Kinsmen of God) (hidden, concealed) (hidden, withdrawn)

**Dan**

**Naphtali**

**Asher**

**Armies of the West**

**Benjamin**

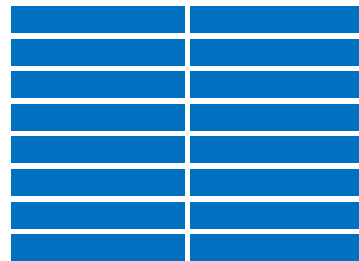
(My deliverance)

**Manasseh**

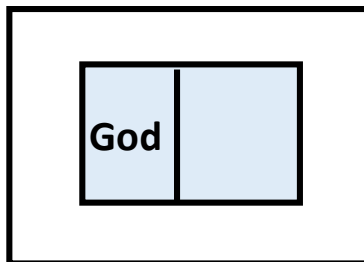
(My fortune)

**Ephraim**

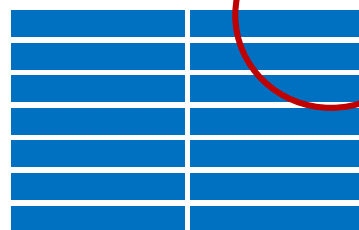
(God is my salvation)



**Sons of Merari**

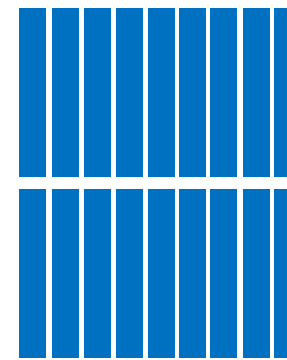


**Sons of Kohath**



**Moses and Aaron**

**250 men  
of renown  
with  
incense**



**Armies of the East**

**Judah**

(One who attacks)

**Issachar**

(He is my redeemer,  
my avenger)

**Zebulun**

(God is my fortune)

**Korah's tents**

**Dathan and Abiram  
in their tents with  
their families**

**Gad**

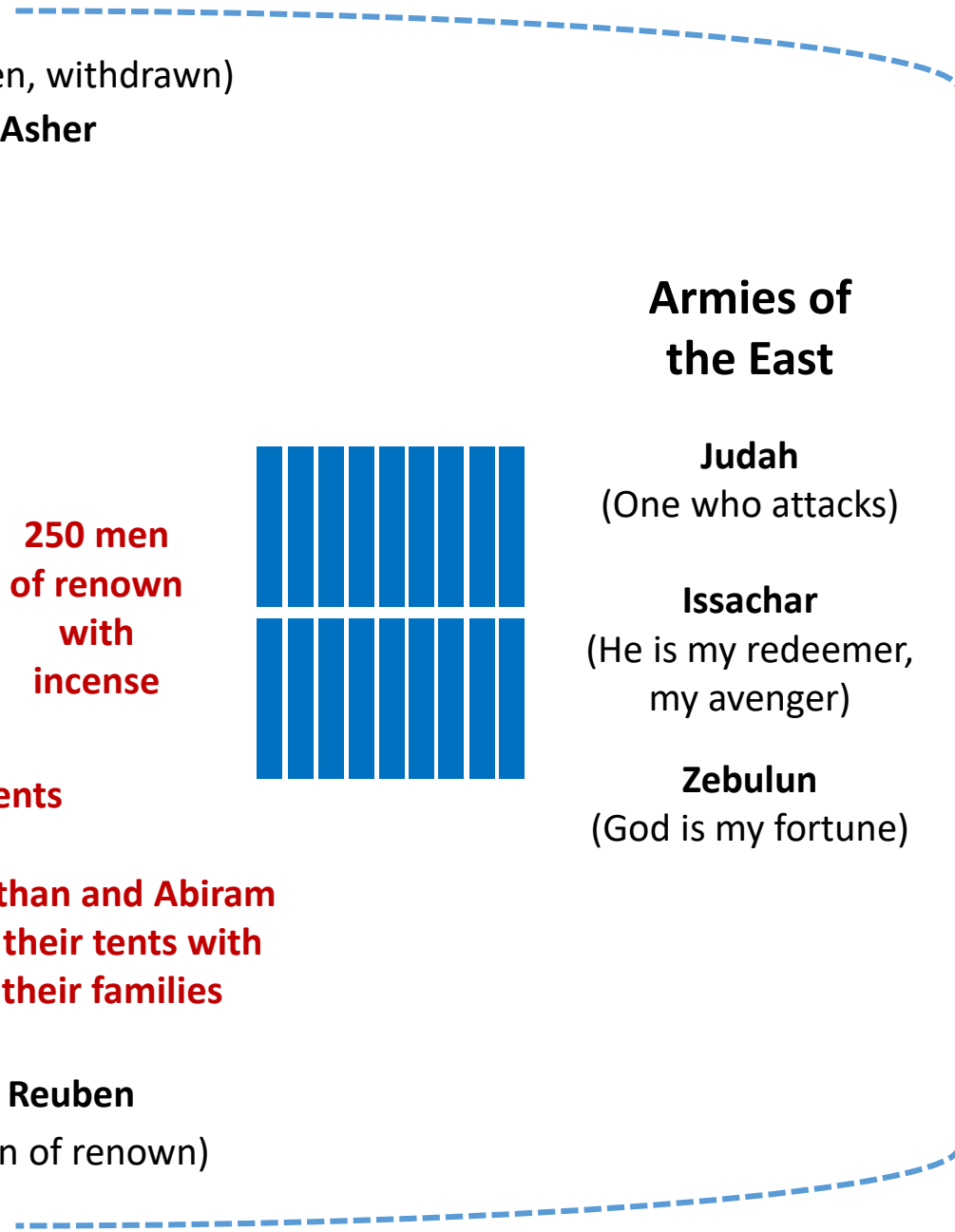
(The majesty of God)

**Simeon**

**Armies of the South**

**Reuben**

(men of renown)



## Last appeal for grace

### Numbers 16:22.

*“El, Elohiym of the spirits of all flesh...”*

A name denoting Most High God at His most powerful, most supreme, most authoritative role – one who rules the spirits within man, not just the physical man of flesh. This is a tribute to God’s majesty and sovereignty.

*“...shall one man sin, and you be angry with all the congregation?”* Even though Korah is the main agitator here, it is clear that the Lord is angry with the lot of Israel. To Moses it appears He is condemning them all for one man’s sin. Moses and Aaron don’t see the entire camp as being guilty of sin – at least not after the likeness of Korah’s sin. So Moses pleads on behalf of the individuals who seemingly have not joined Korah.

Because Moses has upheld the name of God, God’s glory and God’s kingship, God honors Moses’ request.

## The Showdown

### Moses’ request: Read Number 16:23-30

God has not told Moses by what means He will take vengeance on Moses’ enemies. It almost seems as if God is allowing Moses to dictate how his accusers will be dealt with.

- Moses chooses a way that brings glory only to God and establishes God’s sovereign power over His people and His creation.
- Moses does not ask for personal vengeance
- Moses does not ask for any spoil or personal gain from this.
- He *does* ask that they be dealt with immediately and not just allowed to die naturally.
- Moses asks for God to do a “new thing” by having the earth swallow them. Something that bears witness of God’s glory and sovereignty over His creation



# The Reminder

## Numbers 16:36-40.

The censers:

- Eleazar is told to gather the purified censers
- Hammered out as a covering for the bronze altar – the sacrifice altar
- As a memorial: *“no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD.”*
- Every time the children of Israel came to offer a sacrifice for their sins, they were to remember the Korah rebellion. There was a boundary they could not cross as the cost of their lives.
- When you take glory away from the Lord and exceed the realm of authority you have been placed in, you are going to get hammered.

## Respecting the boundaries of the holy vessels

This rebellion began with Korah's unhappiness over the level of authority and boundaries God has given him.

- He wanted entrance into the private world of the priesthood – go behind the veil.
- He wanted more intimacy with the holy vessels than the Lord allowed him as a Kohathite.

There are boundaries and levels of accountability to protect the set apart status of God's holy vessels.

This set-apart status also extends to brides who are the human version of holy vessels set apart for a husband's use.

Vessels with a set-apart status are most vulnerable on the daily walk. The people who come in contact with them must honor those boundaries.

We, as believers, are holy vessels for His use.

We are His bride.

We have a set apart status.

We have boundaries and levels of accountability in our lives to help protect our set apart status in relationships with others on our daily walk.

We have our own version of Kohathites and priests.

# Holy Vessels of the Tabernacle on the Daily Journey

## 2 LEVELS OF PHYSICAL PROTECTION

Numbers 4:5-15



## 2 LEVELS OF PEOPLE PROTECTION

Numbers 4:15-20

### LEVEL 1 – PRIEST

- Has the highest level of intimacy, greatest amount of liberty and greatest accountability with God for the holy vessels.
- He could touch and see the holy items.
- He sanctifies the holy things with the blood of the sacrifice, and cleanses them. He keeps them sanctified and undefiled day to day.
- He is responsible for preparing them to go out among the people.
- Responsible for establishing their boundaries for the Kohathites.

### LEVEL 2 – KOHATHITES, the burden bearers

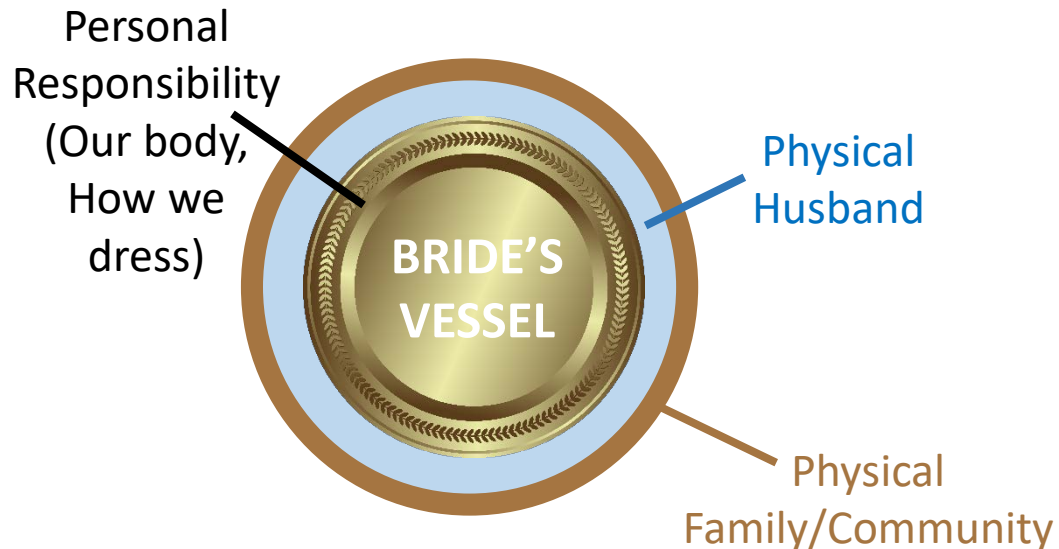
- Allowed some proximity but with boundaries – they could carry but not see the holy things
- Crossing the veil boundary – going under the covers – meant death
- Accountable to the priest for their treatment of the vessels
- Responsible for maintaining the purity of the holy vessel in the absence of the priest.
- Responsible for restraining “outsiders” from coming close.



# Bride's Holy Vessel on the Daily Journey

## PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Unlike the holy things, she has a will, a choice and the ability to maintain her own purity. She is responsible for herself.
- Accountable to God for maintaining her purity
- Accountable to the husband and not to bring shame on his name
- Accountable to the community – she is part of the greater body, and there are consequences for them if she is defiled.



## 2 LEVELS OF PEOPLE PROTECTION

### LEVEL 1 – HUSBAND

- Bride's person (vessel) is for husband's eyes and use only
- He has the highest level of intimacy, greatest amount of liberty and greatest accountability to God for her
- Held accountable to God for keeping her person undefiled (Eph 5:25-27)
- Responsible for establishing her boundaries for the "Kohathites" (family, close friends, community) and "outsiders"
- Intercedes when her personal purity is on the line – backs her up when she needs to play the "husband card"

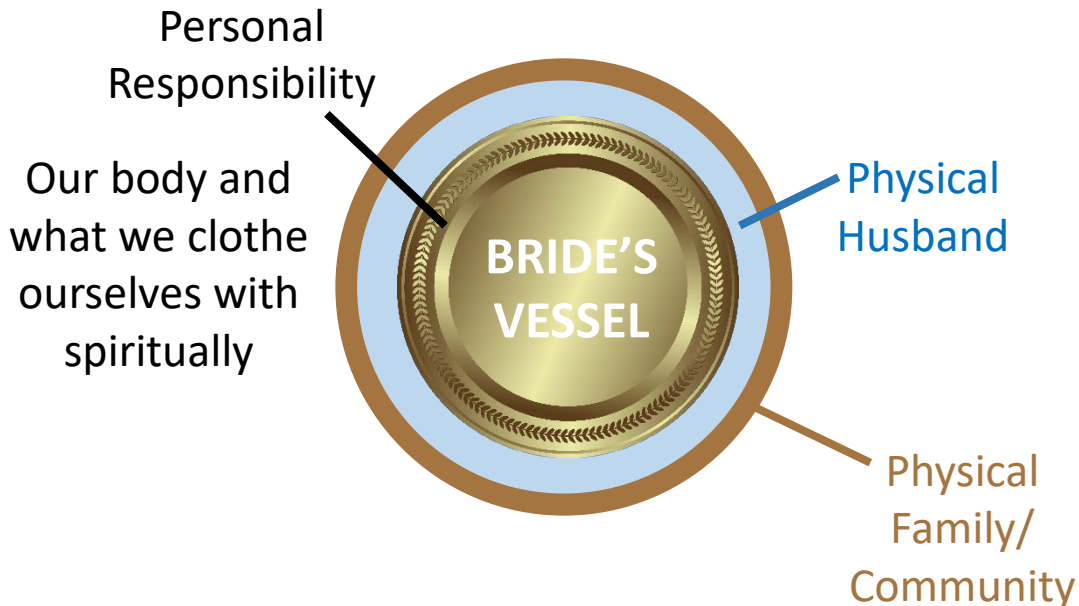
### LEVEL 2 – FAMILY/COMMUNITY

- Have contact with her, but with boundaries
- Inappropriate sexual relationships (going under the covers) meant death
- Accountable to the husband for their treatment of her person
- Responsible for helping maintain her purity in the absence of a husband.
- Intercede when her purity is on the line.

# Spiritual Brides on the Daily Journey

## PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Unlike the holy things, the Bride has a will, a choice and the ability to maintain her own purity. She is primarily responsible for herself.
- Accountable to God for maintaining her purity
- Accountable to the husband/wife, not to bring shame on each other's name
- Accountable to the community – we are part of a greater body, and there are consequences for them if we are defiled.



## 2 LEVELS OF PEOPLE PROTECTION

### LEVEL 1 – CHRIST as SPIRITUAL HUSBAND/PRIEST

- Christ's Bride, the Church, is set apart for His use only
- We experience the highest level of intimacy, greatest amount of liberty and greatest accountability in Christ and the Holy Spirit. (2 Cor 3:17)
- He sanctified us with His sacrifice and cleansed us
- Accountable for keeping us undefiled. (Eph 5:25-27)
- Responsible for establishing our boundaries for the "Kohathites" (other believers) and outside world.
- We are betrothed to Christ, but not yet living in His presence. He gives us His Spirit to help us, but also places responsibility on the congregation for keeping the Bride's (corporate Church's) purity until His return.

### LEVEL 2 – CONGREGATION

- We have contact with each other but with boundaries. We help each other be accountable. We bear one another's burdens.
- Inappropriate sexual relationships result in "putting away" (1 Cor 5)
- Accountable to Christ for our treatment of each other
- Responsible for helping maintain each other's purity until Christ returns.
- Intercede when a believer's purity is on the line and there is a cry for help.

## The Ideal Model

Who helps you on the journey...



**What happens when a Kohathite is unhappy with his place and tries to assume the role of the priest, even the High Priest?**

## Respecting the boundaries of the holy vessels

In our spiritual walk, boundaries are harder to define without the physical representations – no veils, no fences, no altars with hammered coverings. Boundaries still need to be observed in our relationship to others and submission to authority.

We all have a Kohathite role to play in our spiritual journey. It is very tempting as a Kohathite to want to demand a greater level of intimacy than you have been given, especially if you once enjoyed a more intimate role in their lives.

**Example:** Mothers slip from the inner circle to the outer circle their children get married. In this journey, relationships can change. If you are rooted in that role as a mother, you might find yourself rebelling over now being a Kohathite in their lives instead of one of their inner circle.

When you push yourself into the middle of inner-circle relationships or try and assume authority that you have no right to, you cause friction with very bad consequences.

You can cause warfare with those who are rightly in the inner circle – husbands, leadership, even a relationship with Christ. You can become a Korah to this person in your life.

Be circumspect in the way you treat other believers or family members.

If you have Korahs in your life, you will need to re-establish those boundaries. And there is going to be a confrontation. Ask for help from their fellow Kohathites. Ask for help from your inner circle. Ask help from God.