

CHALLENGE • Numbers 16

Read Moses' Call

Exodus 3

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" // ¹² So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?" // ¹⁴ And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

Exodus 4

¹ Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.' " // ² So the Lord said to him, "What *is* that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." V10 • ¹⁰ Then Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue." // ¹¹ So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the Lord? ¹² Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

¹³ But he [Moses] said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever *else* You may send." // ¹⁴ So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

1. Did Moses **want** this **assignment**? Did he **aspire** to **lead** them? Was he **ambitious** for **position**?
2. Clearly not. Keep that in mind as we consider Numbers 16 today.

A Spiritual Inoculation

1. My healthcare provider keeps pressing me to get a flu shot.
 - a. They send me emails urging me to make an appointment to get it.
 - b. When I go in for something, a nurse weighs me, takes my blood pressure,
 - c. Then as she reviews my file, she inevitably says, "Hmmm, you haven't had your flu vaccine. You want to get that today don't you? Hmmm?"
2. The idea is by getting the shot, I'm inoculated against the illness.
3. Today's lesson is a **spiritual** inoculation against a serious malady that infects many churches.
4. By God's good grace, it's NOT something we've been afflicted by here at CCO.
5. A good way to avoid it in the future is by letting the HS inoculate us this morning.

The Scene

1. Because of Israel's failure to trust God we considered last week, they're now doomed to wander the wilderness of Sinai until the entire generation of adults who left Egypt dies off.
2. It's their children who'll enter the PL.
3. As days become weeks, then weeks become months, a little group decides to **challenge** Moses' & Aaron's leadership.

¹ Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan & Abiram the sons of Eliab, & On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; ² and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, 250 leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. ³ They gathered together against Moses & Aaron, & said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every 1 of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

1. 2 groups form-up against Moses & Aaron.
 - a. The first is led by **Korah**, one of the **Kohathites**;
 - 1) That clan of the Levites responsible for tending & transporting the sacred furnishings of the tabernacle.
 - 2) Things like the table of showbread, the golden altar of incense and the golden lampstand.

- b. The second group was led by 3 elders from the tribe of Reuben.
 - c. **Why** these 2 groups link up becomes clear when you realize where they're camped.
2. When Israel set up camp, the tabernacle was at the very center.
 - a. The Kohathites camped immediately to the S.
 - b. And camped right next to them was the tribe of Reuben.
 3. The grousing we read about a couple weeks ago that took place on the outskirts of the camp has moved to the very center now.
 4. **Korah** complains against **Aaron** about the **religious** leadership
While **Dathan, Abiram & On** rebel against **Moses' civil** leadership.
 5. And as is typical of those ambitious for position, they raise a base of supporters.
 - a. They persuade 250 other tribal leaders to join them.
 - b. It probably didn't take much persuasion.
 - c. There are always people who lust after the honor of being top-dog, king of the hill.
 - d. They don't see leadership as a call to serve, but as a place to **be** served.
 - e. They count **success** by how many are **under** their authority.
 - f. Their **value** as an individual is derived by being "**large & in charge.**"
 6. That's these guys. And now that they're a couple hundred strong, they deem the times right to challenge Moses & Aaron.
 7. Note what they say in v3
"You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every 1 of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"
 - a. They mix truth & error.
 - b. God had indeed said Israel was holy.
 - 1) Their covenant with God had set them apart from all other people.
 - 2) The command at the end of ch15 to make a distinctive tassel for their clothes was a constant reminder of their call to be a Holy People among whom God dwelt.
 - c. What wasn't true was the charge that Moses & Aaron took the task of leadership on themselves.
 - d. Neither had! They were appointed to their place by God.
 - e. And as we saw earlier in Exodus, in Moses' case, he didn't **WANT** it! He tried to get out of it.

⁴ So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face;

1. The first thing Moses did in the face of this challenge was to fall on his face before the Lord!
2. Moses knows these rebels make a baseless charge, but he doesn't fire back an immediate retort.
 - a. He falls on his face to seek God.
 - b. V5 is his reply to Korah, but I wonder how long he prayed.
 - c. In light of what he said, I'm sure it was a while.
 - d. While he was face down, be assured he asked God if he'd erred & if there was truth in Korah's complaint.
3. I didn't do that this week.
 - a. I posted something on FB that was misunderstood because I did a poor job of setting its context.
 - b. I got a reply that that was pretty critical.
 - c. I deleted the original comment, but messaged the author of the reply.
 - d. We have some history; and the ensuing conversation didn't go well, **Because I was an idiot.**
 - e. I didn't do what Moses did; I didn't pray. // I moved to immediate defense.
 - f. And I was wrong. My replies **proved** the very thing the other person was saying were true.
 - g. If I had prayed before firing off a reply, I know I would have handled it differently.
4. **Moses** prayed, then rose . . .

⁵ and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That 1 whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him.

1. In prayer God affirmed Moses' call and how he was to handle Korah's complaint.
2. Moses saw clearly that Korah & Co weren't really rebelling against him & his brother; they were rebelling against God.
3. Let's be clear on this: This was a rebellion **against God**.

- a. They'd been given abundant evidence Moses & Aaron were God's choice to lead.
 - b. It was **Moses** who confronted Pharaoh & secured their departure from bondage.
 - c. **Moses** parted the Red Sea.
 - d. **Moses** went up on Sinai to receive God's Word.
 - e. It was **Aaron** who'd been & Moses' side most of the time.
 - f. **He'd** officiated at the dedication of the tabernacle when God's glory came showing his approval of it all.
4. But Korah wasn't content with the role assigned him. He wanted MORE!
- a. Even though as a Kohathite he was privileged above all other Levites to tend to the furniture of the Holy Place,
 - b. He wanted Aaron's job. He wanted to enter the Holy of holies.
5. So Moses said, "God will show us manana who HE PICKS." // Here's how

⁶ Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; ⁷ put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

1. Offering incense as a symbol of prayer & worship was something Aaron as the high priest did.
 - a. Korah said since they were all holy, they were all equally qualified to serve as priests.
 - b. Which isn't what Korah really meant or wanted.
 - c. It was just a point to argue & a way to challenge Aaron's call.
 - d. Korah didn't really want EVERYONE to be able to serve as a priest.
 - e. If everyone could, it would no longer be the special thing he was ambitious for.
 - f. Remember in Orwel's *Animal Farm*; the pigs said all are equal, but some are more equal than others?
 - g. That's Korah's position. "We're **ALL** holy, so **I** ought to be able to do what Aaron does."
2. Moses says, "Let's test your theory. All of you **act** like priests by offering incense. Let's see what happens."
3. Then Moses says, "You accuse **me** of promoting myself. Look in a mirror, Korah!"
4. Now he's going to try & reason with Korah and his supporters.

⁸ Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹ Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; ¹⁰ and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? ¹¹ Therefore you and all your company are gathered together Against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"

1. Israel, as the covenant people of God, were to order themselves as God ordained.
2. That's what the law with all its details, was about.
3. God didn't say, "Yeah, go ahead & decide among yourselves how to follow me."
4. He said, "**THIS** is how to follow Me." And gave them all the stuff we find in Exodus, Lev, Numbers, & Deut.
5. Friends, the same is true for God's covenant people called the Church.
 - a. We each have gifts & a role to play in the Body of Christ that's assigned by God.
 - b. In Eph 4, Paul says God has given specific offices to the Church so we can all grow.
 - 1) Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists & Pastors.
 - 2) In Rom 12 he identifies specific ministries like leading, administration, giving, & mercy to name a few.
 - 3) Then in 1 Cor 12, Paul's very clear that it's the Holy Spirit Who assigns each person their gift & calling.
 - c. Our ambition ought to be for 1 thing; to be faithful in what God's called **us** to; **never** something else.
6. Sadly, **unholy** ambition has always been a problem. It's what turned Lucifer into Satan.
 - a. And since it worked so well with himself, he used it on Eve when he tempted her to eat the forbidden fruit so she could be like God.
7. As I said earlier, while we've been greatly blessed here at CCO to be largely free of the curse of unholy ambition, it **has** shattered many churches.
 - a. Someone eager for honor, power, or recognition rebels against the leader God's calls.

- b. Driven by envy, they grumble & complain, questioning the leader's ability or character.
- c. They don't **pray** FOR that leader; they **spray** their complaint on others.
- d. Guys like Korah always play to an audience.
 - 1) They **recruit** Dathan & Abiram; **build** their 250.
 - 2) They can't **gather** a crowd themselves but they want one, so they **steal** someone else's.
- 8. **Real** leaders like Moses don't just want followers; they want **a destination**, a **goal**.
 - a. Their **vision** is to help people become all they can be in God's plan.
 - b. The goal of mere wanna-bes like Korah is **just to get followers**. There's little beyond that.
 - 1) The Vision of God's Leader sees the people she/he's leading standing in glory.
 - 2) Korah's vision sees himself alone in the spotlight.
- 9. Listen: No man or woman is perfect.
 - a. Even God-ordained, called & gifted leaders have room to grow in grace & truth.
 - b. No one is above rebuke.
 - c. But there's a right way to go about it if it's genuinely meant to improve the leader.
- 10. Korah didn't want to **help** Moses or Aaron.
 - a. From his perspective, they didn't **have** a problem; they **WERE** the problem.
 - b. They stood in the way of his promotion.

¹² And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up!" ¹³ 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? ¹⁴ Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

- 1. These princes of the tribe of Reuben won't even answer Moses summons.
- 2. But they do send a message accusing Moses of failing to fulfill his earlier promises about entering the PL.
- 3. But hold on! That wasn't Moses' fault; it was **THEIRS! They** were the ones who balked at the border.

¹⁵ Then Moses was very angry, 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."

- 1. The accusations Dathan & Abiram make against Moses were so absurd, so groundless and so incredibly dangerous to the welfare of others that Moses gets **really** ticked.
- 2. But instead of blasting them, he again takes it to God and says, "God you know the truth of all this."
- 3. Okay: I've been here.
 - a. Hey, some people have accused me of things I'm guilty of. I admit it. I have a long way till I'm like Jesus.
 - b. But there have times when Dathan & Abiram have accused me of things that were groundless.
 - c. And I did NOT do what Moe did. I did not douse the blazing torch of my wrath in the bucket of His calming grace.
 - d. I fired back well-sharpened salvos of truth aimed to shut them up!
 - e. I need to do what Moses did when falsely accused. Take it to God, then leave it with God.
 - f. He can defend me. And BTW – He always does a much better job of it than I do.
 - g. Watch . . .

¹⁶ And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the Lord—you and they, as well as Aaron. ¹⁷ Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, 250 censers; both you and Aaron, each with his censer." ¹⁸ So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹ And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation. ²⁰ And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²¹ "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

- 1. Moses & Aaron are on one side & the entire nation is on the other.
- 2. God says, "Enough of this. Stand back boys because I'm going to wipe 'em out!"

²² Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?" ²³ So the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ "Speak to the congregation, saying,

‘Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’”

1. After Moses’ & Aaron’s intercession, God agrees to give the people another chance.

²⁵ Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him.

1. These guys refused to go to Moses before, so Moses goes to them.

²⁶ 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.” ²⁷ 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.

1. God’s judgment is going to fall on the rebels.

2. So Moses & Aaron warned people to get away from them. They did.

3. We’ll see this Wednesday what happened to Korah, Dathan, Abiram and the 250 other guys.

4. Suffice it to say, God exonerated Moses’ & Aaron’s call to lead Israel.

CONCLUSION

1. So many great lessons here we’ll get into on Wednesday. Join us.

2. As we end, I want to share how I’ve come to regard relationships of authority & submission as a central & vital part of our Walk with God.

a. The Gospel is all about the Glory of God in Restoring Fallen Humanity to its Rightful Place in Relationship with Him, One Another & the Rest of Creation.

b. What we must understand is that those Relationships are designed BY Him, not us.

c. Who’s in authority and who’s under it aren’t for us to edit or alter.

d. The Author sets those. Our task is accepting what He’s ordained