

Learning from Korah

Numbers 16:36-50

February 15, 2009

Intro

As we come to Numbers chapter 16, we come to two of the most difficult days in Moses' life. Israel has now been turned back from entering into the promised land because of their lack of faith. They chose to listen to the evil report of the 10 spies rather than the encouraging words of Caleb and Joshua.

When Israel was turned back from entering the promised land, they were in the second year of their wilderness journey. God said that they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years because of their lack of faith. The next 10 chapters summarize the next 38 years of their time in the wilderness.

The wilderness is a picture of a spiritually immature state, so there are not a lot of examples of godliness for us to follow. Imagine if a book was written about our lives while we are in a spiritually immature state. It would be a book about what not to do and so it is with Israel's example for us. The Apostle Paul even wrote that these things were written for our instruction that we would not follow their example.

Chapter 16 is about a time of rebellion led by a man named Korah. It is a lesson of immaturity; a lesson of what not to do.

I. We Live in the Age of Rebellion

- 1 The current age of rebellion took hold with the Free Speech Movement in 1964 at the University of California at Berkeley. The idea that students did not have to obey authority simply because it *was* authority spread. Anti-establishmentarianism has become prevalent since then.
- 2 Today, the theme is rebellion against authority, rules, morality, etc.

A. The root is immaturity

- 1 When you study Numbers chapter 16, the problem in Korah's heart becomes quickly evident. He wanted to take a position of authority himself, so he accused Moses of doing the same.
- 2 The scripture instructs us not to have this character within us.

Philippians 2:3, Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

James 3:13-14, Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

- 3 The bible also tells us what happens when we decide to take up exalting or promoting ourselves.

1 Peter 5:5-7 God gives grace to the humble

- 4 Moses responds by falling on his face. What different character we see in each of these men.

B. Don't sow the seeds of discontent

- 5 It wasn't enough that Korah had rebellion and discontent in his own heart; he had to sow the seeds of discontent and feed the immaturity of others.
- 6 First he started with Dathan, Abiram and On, but then he was able to influence the entire congregation – see verse 19.
- 7 This was a very dangerous situation for Moses and Aaron, if they had taken a vote at that moment Moses and Aaron would have lost!
- 8 This is exactly why we do not do voting here at the church. Voting will sow the seeds of discontent and separate the people into camps.

Illus – I happened to mention this once to some pastors and one of them wanted to know more so we had lunch...

- 9 What we need is to come to agreement in our maturity.

Amos 3:3, Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Illus – Why didn't Israel simply divide up at Kadesh Barnea and those with faith move forward and those without faith stay back?

What they needed was to be in agreement with God and in agreement with each other in their maturity and in their faith. But instead they were together in the immature faith of the ten spies.

- 10 The ten spies sowed the seeds of their lack of faith and Korah has sown the seeds of his discontent.
- 11 It was not enough that Korah was a Levite and had the privilege of carrying the holy things, he wanted more.

12 Apparently, having Levi genes is not enough. **See verses 8-10.**

C. Beware of the 'blame shifter'

13 Moses then sent a summons for Dathan and Abiram to come, but they refused to even acknowledge the authority of Moses' summons.

14 What then followed was classic blame shifting.

15 They blamed Moses for taking them out of Egypt where it flowed with 'milk and honey' – which was not true for Israel. They then said that Moses was at fault for not bringing them into the land of Canaan.

16 There are too many people in the world who are not willing to take responsibility for their own decisions, they want to blame someone else for their problems and so we are seeing a trend that brings terrible consequences.

17 There are two ways people try to place the blame on someone else, either they twist and turn the truth, or they focus on an error and won't let go.

Illus – When I was in the business world, I admitted to a mistake to a co-worker who then wouldn't let me forget it.

Illus – It would have been easy to have found fault with Aaron, especially after the golden calf incident, but he was still given the grace to be the high priest.

II. God Uses Servant-Leaders

1 What a contrast between the heart and character of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and that of Moses.

2 What a lesson for us to learn when we see both a bad example and a good and godly example.

A. We need to live before God

1 What was missing from Korah, Dathan and Abiram was an understanding of what God wanted.

2 Moses immediately called them before the Lord. If they had gotten themselves there first, these things may not have happened, that is, if they had a teachable heart.

3 But the point is that the presence of God was the key to getting things right with God. Moses trusted that God would be able to resolve the challenge.

- 4 Notice that whenever Moses faced another challenge to his leadership, and there were many, he fell on his face before God.
- 5 This is an example of Moses as a servant leader because he knows that as God's servant he can rely on God's leading.
- 6 One of the greatest examples in scripture of servant leadership is actually found in this chapter.
- 7 The next day when Israel blamed Moses and Aaron for the deaths of Korah and the others, God set a plague in the camp. But Moses called Aaron to take a censor and stand in the gap between the living and the dead. Literally, they placed themselves at risk of death in order to save those who were accusing them.
- 8 Is this not a powerful picture of Jesus Christ who loved us even when we were His enemies?

Romans 5:8, But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

B. Learn to be content with God's grace

- 9 God gave different responsibilities to various clans within Levi according to the pleasure of His good will, but they must learn to be content with what God is giving them.
- 10 It's God's grace that gives us what He desires to give...

Ephesians 4:7, But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

- 1 Later in that same chapter it says that it is He who gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers...

Ephesians 4:12, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

- 2 What is beautiful about the follow-up to the story of Korah is that his descendents apparently learned from this event.
- 3 In fact, several of our Psalms were written by the sons of Korah. Look at the introduction to Psalms 44-49 and Psalms 84-88. Several of them are attributed to the sons of Korah.

4 The sons of Korah are the ones who wrote the beautiful words of Psalm 42:1

Psalm 42:1, As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.

1 The most beautiful verse, however, comes from Psalm 84. Here the sons of Korah become content with even being doorkeepers in the house of the Lord.

Psalm 84:10, For one day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.