

Into the Promised Land - Joshua's Story
Lesson #16 – Beginning the Forty Years of Wandering
“An Ancient Modern-Day-Style Protest”
•HANDOUT•

► In this current study lesson, we move on to Chapter 15 of Numbers. It is natural for us to expect Chapter 15 to proceed with the start of the years of wandering. Not only does it **not** do that, but it doesn't even refer to the forty years ahead of them. It reads like that whole situation with the twelve spies never happened.

The best way to grasp the message of this chapter is to realize that God is giving the Second Generation a security message. God is giving them guidelines and preparation for the time “when you enter the land of your dwelling places that I [the LORD] am giving you. [15:2]

This is why this chapter does not deal with the 40 years of wanderings. Instead it deals with things like instructions for offerings for unintentional sins, as well as offerings for defiant sins; instructions on keeping the Sabbath and the consequences of violating it; it also addresses some dress codes, including the reasons for the tassels on garments: the tassels are there to remind everyone to obey God's commandments. This chapter will close with: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God.”

Q: How do you think those who had been designated to enter the Land, forty years in the future, feel about God's Judgment on the First Generation? [Considering human nature, the Second Generation people were probably divided into what three main groups?]

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

► We move on to Chapter 16, which takes place sometime during the 40 years of wandering – probably early in the sequence of time considering the dialogue – perhaps even at the beginning.

The chapter opens with the story of the rebellion of Korah. This is a disturbing story that might grate against your sensitivities, but it illustrates the vital truth about the seriousness of sin and rebellion against God's chosen leaders. At this point in time, one would hope that some hard lessons were being learned by Israel. But, no! Instead we see continuing episodes of murmuring, complaining, and rebellion.

Korah was a Levite, the grandson of Kohath, whose family was responsible for transporting the items within the tabernacle, including the Ark of the Covenant, from place to place. Their family reported to Eleazar, Aaron's son. Korah was very ambitious and wanted a more prestigious position. Actually he wanted to be a priest. But God had designated only Aaron and his sons as priests. Korah became jealous and resentful of the situation and began to protest against God's decision. Korah's protest was joined by Dathan and Abiram, two Hebrews from the tribe of Reuben, along with 250 of the leaders of Israel.

Korah and his protest group confronted Moses, telling him he had gone too far with his authority. He argued that the **entire community had an equal right to the priesthood.** [Doesn't that sound a lot like the current ideology of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?]

Moses responded by telling Korah that he and his group of protesters they were the ones who had gone too far. Moses fell facedown and said, “In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to Him and who is holy, and He will have that person come near Him.”

Moses then challenged Korah to a test. The very next morning Korah and his followers were to meet Moses in front of the entrance to the Tabernacle to offer incense before the Lord: **“The man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy.”**

Q: Why did Moses fall facedown and speak to Korah from that position?

Q: What does Moses mean when he says “the man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy?”

► After laying out the test, Moses then spoke to the foundational cause of Korah's protest:

Numbers 16:9-10 • “Isn't it enough for you [as a Levite] that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near Himself to do the work at the Lord's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? He has brought you, and all your fellow Levites, near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too.”

Moses finished his reprimand by reminding Korah that his rebellion was not against him or his brother, Aaron, but “*it is against the Lord that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?*”

Q: What is at the foundational principle of Korah's protest?

► Moses also wanted to confront Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, not just Korah. They were Korah's co-conspirators and they should also accept responsibility for this protest. Moses summoned them to meet with him, but they refused.

Numbers 16: 12b-15 • “We will not come! Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!”

Q: What would make these two men act so defiantly?

Q: Is there any truth in their statement?

► Moses' response was filled with anger. However, in the end, Moses acted righteously and turned the matter over to the Lord, asking Him to handle it. But Moses did defend himself to the Lord by saying that he was a man of integrity and had never hurt either one of these men.

After Moses cooled down a bit, he turned back to Korah and said in a strong authoritative voice:

Numbers 16: 16b-17 • “You and all your followers are to appear before the Lord tomorrow--you and they and Aaron. Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it – 250 censers in all – and present it before the Lord. You and Aaron are to present your censers also.”

So the challenge, the test will take place whether they like it or not.

**Ultimately, Dathan and Abiram have no voice in the matter.
God will affirm Moses' leadership over the nation of Israel.
In the End, there will be no question as to whom God has chosen to lead
and whom has a holy standing before the LORD ...**

Number 16:18-22 [NLT] • 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.

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, and the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Get away from all these people so that I may instantly destroy them!"

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?"

Q: Why would Moses say this was the sin of only one man? There were the 250 elders of Israel as well as Dathan and Abiram who were protesting with Korah.

The Lord responds to Moses' and Aaron' request by changing His instructions ...

Numbers 16: 23-26 • Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to the assembly, 'Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'" Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. He warned the assembly, "Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins."

Q: What truth does this instruction tell us about sin?

Number 16:27-35 • So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents. Then Moses said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt."

As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, "The earth is going to swallow us too!"

Then a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 leaders who had offered incense before the Lord.

Q: Ultimately, these men's sin represented a rejection of the Lord. They paid a terrible price for their contempt. But what was the worst part of the price of their sin?

Numbers 16:36-40 • The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to take the censers out of the smoldering remains and scatter the coals some distance away, for the censers are holy-- the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives. Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the Lord and have become holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites."

So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers brought by those who had been burned up, and he had them hammered out to overlay the altar, as the Lord directed him through Moses. This was to remind the Israelites that no one except a descendant of Aaron should come to burn incense before the Lord, or he would become like Korah and his followers.

Q: What three things does this incident tell us about the Lord?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

► Epilogue: A later chapter in Numbers will reveal a surprise regarding Korah's family. The Lord showed extraordinary mercy and miraculous intervention the day Korah died. The scripture passage indicates that though Korah himself were among those whom "the earth swallowed up," his sons did not die with him. His descendants, known as "the sons of Korah" would become temple singers and are responsible for writing eleven of the Psalms: Numbers 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 84, 85, 87, and 88. [ref: Numbers 26: 10-11]

**Okay ... it is done and over.
There will now be no more protests!
Moses can now get on with leading the people thru the wilderness for the next 40 years.
Israel has learned that Moses is in charge and God Almighty is on the Throne.
But that isn't what happened. The very next day the community of Israel,
once again, started grumbling against Moses & Aaron.**

This is where we will pick up the story next time ...



Next Time • Lesson #17
“ The Ultimate Price Tag of Incurable Behavior ”

