

Numbers Chapter 16 – Korah’s Revolt

Read Numbers 16:1-3

Four men, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On, rally leaders around them to revolt. Korah was of the line of Levi. The Levites were privileged to serve in connection with the tabernacle and in assistance to the priests, led by Aaron.

Unsatisfied with that supporting role, Korah claims that since “all in the congregation are holy,” all have equal access to God. Thus, he and his followers believe that they should have all the privileges of priests, to enter God’s presence in the tabernacle itself. Like all cult leaders, Korah’s message has a kernel of truth. As recently as God’s law-giving at Kadesh-barnea, God had reminded the people: “So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.” (Num. 15:40). What should have guided the people in deciding whether to listen to him?

Read Numbers 16:4-7, 8-11

Moses’ response is in two parts. First he addresses “Korah and all his company.” Then, he addresses Korah and his fellow Levites. What does he say to each?

Censers: God had instructed Aaron and the priests to use censers (a vessel for burning incense) when they entered the Holy of Holies so that they would not be able to see the atonement seat. Leviticus 16:11-13

Read Numbers 16:12-15

Moses attempted a truce with Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben. They refused to speak to him in a blatant defiance of his position as leader. Their complaint is different from that of Korah. Is their complaint just? Who is to blame for the fact that the Israelites did not enter the Promised Land?

Read Numbers 16:16-18

Moses commands each of the 250 rebels to assemble, along with Aaron, for the Lord’s judgment. They were instructed to bring their censers, because the office they desired was the priesthood. If God chose them, they were prepared to begin service as priests. However, remember Leviticus 10:1-3.

Read Numbers 16:19-24

Korah had assembled all the congregation against Moses, so the Lord’s anger included all the congregation. Compare the intercession of Moses and Aaron on the people’s behalf with Korah’s selfishness in rallying them to him.

Read Numbers 16:25-35

The Lord’s judgment is swift and absolute. As Moses had suggested, the nature of the judgment left no doubt it was from God. Lookup 2 Corinthians 10:17-18

Read Numbers 16:36-40 The Lord provided a reminder of His judgment and a warning against similar sin.

Read Numbers 16:41-50

Despite God’s miraculous indication of His will, the people continued to treat it as the actions of Moses, a man, and to grumble against him and his authority. As the unauthorized censers had been met with judgment, the censer of Aaron, God’s appointed priest, stopped the plague.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13

“respect those who labor ... admonish you.” The young Thessalonian community was not adequately appreciating its leaders. The Greek term translated “are over you” means “rule, direct, be at the head of,” and would refer to the elders and overseers in the church. “Be at peace among yourselves” may suggest that there were tensions within the community, but it may also warn of the divisions within the church that can be caused by some disrespecting its leaders.

Read Hebrews 13:17

Obey, submit. These statements are stronger than the related comments about leaders in v. 7, for here submission to leaders is directly commanded. Such obedience will benefit those who submit, since their souls will be cared for and there will be harmony and joy in their mutual responsibilities.