

**Numbers 16:1** ¶ Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*:

**Numbers 16:2** And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

**Numbers 16:3** And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, *Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?*

This chapter opens with a record of yet another rebellion against Moses with pride at its root. Korah, of the tribe of Levi, and Dathan, Abiram and On, of the tribe of Reuben gathered a coalition of 250 men that were recognized as leaders among the people to challenge the leadership of Moses. They claimed that all of the people had been set apart as holy before the LORD; therefore, why should Moses be the one in charge?

As we continue to read, it seems that they are jealous of the choice of Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. They were thinking Moses had given that privilege to Aaron because he was his brother.

JFB provided some insight as to why men from the tribe of Reuben would have been the primary coconspirators with Korah and the sons of Levi. They reasoned that the priesthood was considered to be the right of the firstborn of every family. Since Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob, they felt like that privilege should have been given to the sons of Reuben.

**Numbers 16:4** And when Moses heard *it*, he fell upon his face:

**Numbers 16:5** And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, *Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.*

Moses immediately fell to the ground face down. I am assuming this to be a sign of his despair at the attitude of his people; some commentators posit that he was praying. He told Korah and those who had joined him in protest that the LORD would make it clear whom He had chosen to “come near unto Him” (as priests seems to be implied). In fact, the LORD would make it clear whom He had chosen to serve as the leader of the people.

**Numbers 16:6** This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company;

**Numbers 16:7** And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be *that* the man whom the LORD doth choose, he *shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.*

Moses then instructed Korah and all those with him to take their censers and bring them prepared with fire and incense to present before the LORD. This is significant because only the priests were authorized to offer incense before the

LORD. The LORD would then make clear whom He had chosen. Moses had nothing to do with the choice of Aaron. He boldly told this group of Levis that they had assumed more authority than they possessed.

**Numbers 16:8 And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: Numbers 16:9 Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?**

**Numbers 16:10 And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?**

**Numbers 16:11 For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?**

Moses then basically pointed out what a privilege had been conferred upon the sons of Levi to have been chosen to serve the LORD in the tabernacle and serve His people. It is verse ten that clarifies that he understood their complaint to be that they should also be allowed to serve as priests. Considering their privileged position among the people, Moses didn't understand why they would complain against the LORD and murmur against Aaron.

**Numbers 16:12 ¶ And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up:**

**Numbers 16:13 Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?**

**Numbers 16:14 Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up.**

It seems that Dathan and Abiram left while Moses was talking to Korah, so Moses sent for them; but they refused to come. They treated Moses with complete contempt and answered him with a taunting message. They declared that Moses had taken them out of a land flowing with milk and honey (referencing Egypt) and still had not brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey as you promised—a land that was to be our inheritance from the LORD. They accused him of bringing them into the desert to kill them and acting like an overlord in the process.

“wilt thou put out the eyes of these men?” – After looking at several commentaries, this seems to be a way of implying that Moses expected the people to follow him blindly or that he thought they were blind to his faults. Coffman quotes Plaut as revealing that this as an idiom that means to "fool us, hoodwink us, throw dust in our eyes, or blind us to the true facts."

It must be noted that as the primary organizers of the rebellion made their complaints and accusations, the group of 250 leaders remain silent. We will see as we continue to read that their silence was a sign of their agreement. Not one is recorded as speaking up in defense of Moses or Aaron.

**Numbers 16:15 And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering; I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.**

Meek Moses is now very angry. Meekness is not weakness; it is strength under control. He reminds the LORD that he has not abused his authority in any way and asks the LORD not to respect the offering made by these men. I assume that Moses is speaking in reference to the presentation of the censers.

I liked Guzik's observation on this verse: "Sometimes people are offended that a man like Moses was **angry** with men like Dathan and Abiram. They think a gentle, easy love is the proper response. Such thinking is understandable, but wrong. Shepherds are gentle with wayward sheep who might injure themselves, but they are passionate against wolves who would injure the flock."

**Numbers 16:16 And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow:**

**Numbers 16:17 And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each *of you* his censer.**

**Numbers 16:18 And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron.**

**Numbers 16:19 And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.**

Moses instructed Korah to appear with the whole group of men that had sided with him at the door of the tabernacle the next morning. Each man was to bring a censer containing fire and incense and Aaron would do the same. Amazingly, they were so blinded with pride that they did as Moses requested. The glory of the LORD made His presence known before all that were gathered there.

**Numbers 16:20 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,**

**Numbers 16:21 Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.**

**Numbers 16:22 And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?**

The LORD then told Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the group that had gathered there so that He could destroy them in an instant. Moses and Aaron fell prostrate before the LORD and begged Him as the giver of all life not to take the lives of the whole congregation because of the sin of one man—in reference to Korah as the primary instigator.

**Numbers 16:23 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,**

**Numbers 16:24 Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about**

**the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.**

**Numbers 16:25 And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him.**

**Numbers 16:26 And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.**

**Numbers 16:27 So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.**

The LORD relented and told Moses to get the people to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. (It seems On has come to his senses.) Moses then headed to the tents of Dathan and Abiram with the elders of Israel following close behind him. (Remember the 70 elders that were chosen back in chapter 11.) Moses then instructed all the people near the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram to distance themselves from their tents and to be careful not to even touch anything belonging to them. If they did, they too would be consumed in the LORD's judgment. The people did as Moses said. Moses notes that Dathan and Abiram came out to stand in the door of their tents along with their wives, sons and little children.

JFB notes that Korah's tent would not have been in the camp of Reuben, but this appears to be where Moses took his stand since the challenge of Dathan and Abiram was directed at him.

**Numbers 16:28 And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for *I have not done them* of mine own mind.**

**Numbers 16:29 If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; *then* the LORD hath not sent me.**

**Numbers 16:30 But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that *appertain* unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.**

Moses then boldly declared that the LORD was going to affirm that Moses was acting in accordance with His command. It will be the work of the LORD—not of Moses. Moses declared that if these men died a natural death, then it would prove that the LORD had not sent him. However, if the LORD did something new and caused the earth to open up and swallow these men and all that belonged to them taking them straight to the pit, it would clearly show that they had scorned the LORD.

**Numbers 16:31 And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that *was* under them:**

**Numbers 16:32 And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that *appertained* unto Korah, and all *their* goods.**

**Numbers 16:33 They, and all that *appertained* to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.**

As soon as Moses had finished speaking, the ground opened up and swallowed the men and everything belonging to them. Moses notes that they were swallowed up alive and the earth closed back up.

**Numbers 16:34 And all Israel that *were* round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up *also*.**

All the people that had witnessed this miracle began fleeing when they heard the screams of those being swallowed up in the earth. They were afraid they might be next.

**Numbers 16:35 ¶ And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.**

The LORD then dealt with the 250 men that had sided with the leaders of the conspiracy and sent fire to consume the men that had presumed to offer their incense before the LORD.

We know from a later chapter in this book that Korah and his belongings were swallowed up as well; maybe Aaron headed to that location when Moses went to confront Dathan and Abiram in the camp of Reuben. We also know that Korah was not left without descendants. I would assume these descendants were old enough to make their own decisions and had disagreed with their father and distanced themselves from their family at the time of judgment.

*Numbers 26:9–11 “And the sons of Eliab; Nemuel, and Dathan, and Abiram. This is that Dathan and Abiram, which were famous in the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the LORD: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign. Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not.”*

This is a hard teaching. I know I cringe at the thought of the little children in particular being condemned to the fate of their wicked fathers. Personally, I believe that those children that were under the age of accountability (an age known only to the LORD and probably different for each individual) will be in heaven. As far as the others of their families that were destroyed with them, I believe it was an act that looked toward the future and preventing another rebellion by those seeking vengeance for the judgment enacted against their fathers.

This should also serve as a strong warning against associating with those who choose to reject God’s word. The more you associate with such people, the more you will become like them and will eventually find yourself out of God’s will and suffering the consequences.

**Numbers 16:36 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,  
Numbers 16:37 Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up**

the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed.

**Numbers 16:38** The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates *for* a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.

**Numbers 16:39** And Eleazar the priest took the brasen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad *plates for* a covering of the altar:

**Numbers 16:40** *To be* a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.

Once the judgment of the LORD had been completed, He told Moses to tell Eleazar, Aaron's son, to gather all the censers that had belonged to the men who were destroyed by fire. Because they had been used to present incense before the LORD, they were considered holy. These censers served to testify against the sin of those that had used them. Eleazar was to take these censers, hammer them flat and use them to make a covering for the altar. This covering was to serve as a reminder to the people that only those of the seed of Aaron were to be permitted to offer incense before the LORD per the command of the LORD through Moses.

Adam Clarke pointed out that Aaron is a type of Jesus Christ. He explained, "The sacrifices of living animals pointed out the death of Christ on the cross; the incense, his intercession. Through his death salvation is purchased for the world; by his intercession the offending children of men are spared.... By the awful transactions recorded in this chapter, we may see how jealous God is of the sole right of appointing the way and means of salvation.... The way of God's own appointment, the agony and death of Christ, is the only way in which souls can be saved. His is the priesthood, and his is the only available sacrifice. All other modes and schemes of salvation are the inventions of men or devils, and will in the end prove ruinous to all those who trust in them."

**Numbers 16:41** ¶ But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.

Amazing to me, on the very next day the people of Israel began murmuring against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of killing the people of the LORD. How could they not understand that it was the hand of God in light of such amazing miraculous judgments!

**Numbers 16:42** And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.

**Numbers 16:43** And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the

congregation.

**Numbers 16:44 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,**

**Numbers 16:45 Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.**

As the people gathered together to complain against Moses and Aaron, they saw the cloud cover the tabernacle and the glory of the LORD reveal His presence in it. Moses and Aaron immediately went to the tabernacle. The LORD then told Moses to get away from the people because he was going to destroy all of them.

Once again Moses and Aaron prostrated themselves before the LORD.

**Numbers 16:46 And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun.**

**Numbers 16:47 And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people.**

**Numbers 16:48 And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.**

**Numbers 16:49 Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah.**

**Numbers 16:50 And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed.**

I believe that Moses was led by the Holy Spirit in all of his responses to the complaints and accusations of the people. I also believe that it was through the Spirit's guidance that he knew how to respond to the LORD each time. This time he told Aaron to go and get a censer of incense and take fire from the altar to light it and quickly circulate among the congregation to make atonement for the people. He knew that the LORD was very angry and had sent a judgment of plague among the people. Aaron obeyed immediately and the plague was stopped, but not before 14,700 people had died. This was in addition to the deaths of those associated with the rebellion of Korah. Aaron returned to join Moses at the door of the tabernacle when the plague had been stopped.

Aaron was acting in the role of intercessor. In the scripture, incense is recognized as representing the prayers of the saints.

*Revelation 8:3-4 "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."*

Prayer is the most powerful weapon at the Christian's disposal; and, sad to say, probably the least used. There are so many beautiful prayer promises. These are some of my favorites.

*1 Thessalonians 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."*

*James 5:16 "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."*

*Hebrews 4:16 "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."*

*Matthew 21:22 "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."*

*John 15:7 "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."*

*Matthew 7:7-8 "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."*