

Lesson 8 24th June, 2018

The Sin of Rebellion

Lesson Scope: Numbers 15-19

References in brackets refer to the lesson scope unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

The rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram likely took place in the wilderness of Kadesh, where Israel had refused to enter the Promised Land. After God had sentenced the rebellious to die in the wilderness, they had presumed to attack the inhabitants of Canaan without divine assistance (14:39-45). Defeat and confusion resulted.

Then God gave directives for sacrifices, a Sabbath breaker was stoned, and God commanded the children of Israel to wear fringes of blue on their clothes (chapter 15). Perhaps rebellion grew out of resentment concerning the wearing of that fringe, since it came on the heels of not being allowed to enter Canaan.

Previous to the time of Moses, the heads of tribes and families had served as priests (Job 1:5), but now that the priesthood was falling upon the tribe of Levi, men of other tribes, like Dathan and Abiram, must have sensed a loss of position. Korah was a Levite and in that sense was of equal rank to Moses and Aaron, but he wanted to be equal in fact as well as in name. These rebels united in a common grievance against God-given authority.

Rebellion is an affront to the Lord. It rises from proud ambitions, defies God-ordained authority, and will ultimately receive divine judgment.

When people break laws, they illustrate them. A reckless driver's collision illustrates why traffic laws were enacted in the first place. A rebel's sorry end illustrates why God urges us to work with the authorities He has established for our direction and safety.

No doubt all of us have been rebels at times, to some degree. May we learn from our memories of those times so that God can spare us from the awful fate of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Lesson Aim: To identify the expressions and the end of rebellion.

Theme Verse: 1 Samuel 15:23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Lesson Text

Defiance

Numbers 16:1-3 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*: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: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?

Numbers 16:8-13 And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: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?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?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?¹² And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up: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?

Judgment

Numbers 16:25-26 And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him.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 16:32-35 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.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.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*.³⁵ And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

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.

Numbers 16:46-48 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.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.⁴⁸ And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

Confirmation

Numbers 17:6-10 And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, *even* twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron *was* among their rods.⁷ And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.⁸ And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.⁹ And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod.¹⁰ And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not.

Questions for Study

Defiance

1. What seeds were nurtured that resulted in rebellion?
2. Why is a typical rebel not ready to stand alone?
3. Is there such a thing as taking too much authority upon oneself? Explain.

Judgment

4. How did Moses point the people away from himself and his authority (16:11, 30)?
5. Why did God make such a dramatically final example of the rebels?
6. How should we relate to the rebellious after the church has dealt with them?

Confirmation

7. What was it about Aaron's fruitful rod that stopped people from murmuring?
8. How had the question the people raised in 17:12-13 already been answered?
9. How should we relate to whatever authority we ourselves have been given?

Analyzing the Passage

Aaron's priesthood provided a God-given way to holiness. But rebellious Korah declared the people holy without Aaron's high priesthood and allowed that every man could be his own priest. In effect, Korah rejected God's plan of salvation.

Korah declared that God was present among the rebellious, but their defeat by the Canaanites had proved otherwise (14:42-45).

Dathan and Abiram accused Moses of tyranny and unfairness (16:14). What they blamed Moses for—failure to enter Canaan—was entirely their own fault (16:13-14). So unjust were their accusations that the meekest man became wroth (16:15). He had already saved their lives by his intercession to God for them (14:11-21).

The deaths of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram should have silenced the gainsaying. But more rebellion followed the next day when Moses and Aaron were accused of killing "the people of the LORD," and a plague killed 14,700 more people. Finally, when Aaron's rod budded as a sign of his authority, the rebellion was quenched.

Korah may have been among those who identified with Moses at Sinai when he asked, "Who is on the LORD'S side? ... And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him" (Exodus 32:26). But in the end, Korah perished as a gainsayer (Jude 11). However, his children were spared (26:11).

Principles and Applications

Defiance

1. Leaders are not immune from having rebellious hearts (16:1). In fact, leaders must be especially careful about this. The taste of authority can intoxicate and can lead one to resent others who have still more authority. Among spiritual men, however, we often find that the more authority one has, the more cautious he becomes.

2. The rebellious look for support in their rebellion and influence others in doing so (16:1). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram assembled "two hundred and fifty princes, . . . men of renown" (16:2). The rebel who stands alone is rare. Rebels find security in numbers. Bible students suggest that when Satan fell, a third of the angels fell with him (Revelation 12:4). Today he influences the influential, and we need to beware lest we fall with them.

3. Rebels often appear to be very religious (16:3). These people had seemingly good things to say about the Lord, about holiness, and about the danger of lifting oneself up! But their "good words and fair speeches" (Romans 16:18) rang hollow in the ears of the spiritually discerning.

4. Rebellion can be expressed by falsely accusing others (16:3). Moses and Aaron had taken only the authority that God had given them. Moses had already shared his authority with others (11:24-29). But the rebels did what we can easily do ourselves—select and slant the facts until we end up with a basically false picture.

5. Dissatisfaction with our present calling is an expression of rebellion (16:8-10). That the King of heaven would accept one's contribution at all is cause for great pleasure. That He advances us, giving us greater responsibilities as life moves on, is reason for greater satisfaction. Grasping for more than God gives us is a quick way to lose it all.

6. The rebellious refuse to cooperate in resolving issues (16:12). In a time of such serious rebellion, Moses made a very gracious offer to talk with them. If our leaders are willing to sacrifice time from their busy schedules to talk to us, we should be willing to listen and take heed.

Judgment

7. Rebellion is wickedness (16:26). Wicked is a strong word, but Moses used it here. Ironically, it was to Saul, who tried so hard to eradicate witchcraft, that Samuel said, "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Samuel 15:23). God takes this matter seriously.

8. The righteous must separate from the rebellious to avoid their influence and inclusion in their judgment (16:26). Here Moses called for a physical separation, a literal walking away from the rebels. (See Psalm 1:1). One church's discipline states, "Those members who stand by such who are out of fellowship place themselves in the same state."

9. Rebellion brings God's judgment (16:32-35). "Surely he scorneth the scorners" (Proverbs 3:34). The sobering thing about God's judgment is that He will not reverse it. Koran, Dathan, and Abiram have not returned.

10. Atonement and mediation for rebellion are required to stay divine wrath (16:46, 48). There is a cure for rebellion, but it must come God's way. We also can make peace with God if we accept His provision on His terms.

Confirmation

11. At times, God vindicates His delegated authority for a token against the rebels (17:6-10). In this case, God's benediction on Aaron's authority took the form of producing flowers and almonds from a common wooden rod. Today the evident spiritual life of a leader does much to support his authority, even if his administration is not always perfect. (See 1 Thessalonians 2:10.)

12. Living in submission brings fruitfulness and delivers the soul from death (17:6, 8, 10). Aaron's submission to God and willingness to accept his high but subordinate place brought fruitfulness to his rod. As the other elders found their places, they not only would be saved from death but also could go on to live fruitful lives.

Important Teachings

1. Leaders are not immune from having rebellious hearts (16:1).
2. The rebellious look for support in their rebellion and influence others in doing so (16:1).
3. Rebels often appear to be very religious (16:3).
4. Rebellion can be expressed by falsely accusing others (16:3).
5. Dissatisfaction with our present calling is an expression of rebellion (16:8-10).
6. The rebellious refuse to cooperate in resolving issues (16:12).
7. Rebellion is wickedness (16:26).
8. The righteous must separate from the rebellious to avoid their influ-

ence and inclusion in their judgment (16:26).

9. Rebellion brings God's judgment (16:32-35).

10. Atonement and mediation for rebellion are required to stay divine wrath (16:46, 48).

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Answers to Questions

1. What seeds were nurtured that resulted in rebellion?

The rebels began to think too much of their own authority and too little of Moses' authority. They were probably irritated over the requirement to wear "a ribband of blue" (15:38-39). No doubt they magnified the frustrations of wilderness life and blamed Moses for it all.

2. Why is a typical rebel not ready to stand alone?

Perhaps he realizes the weakness of his own position. This is in contrast to the man who can stand alone if he knows he is standing with God (2 Timothy 4:16-17).

3. Is there such a thing as taking too much authority upon oneself? Explain.

Yes, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram did. It was the very thing of which they accused Moses and Aaron.

4. How did Moses point the people away from himself and his authority (16:11, 30)?

He always pointed to the Lord, the final authority.

5. Why did God make such a dramatically final example of the rebels?

He had appealed to them, and they had made it clear that they were set on being a negative and contagious influence. There was nothing left to do but place them under the ultimate quarantine.

6. How should we relate to the rebellious after the church has dealt with them?

"Note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

7. What was it about Aaron's fruitful rod that stopped people from murmuring?

It was an unmistakable confirmation from God. It served as a permanent record of Aaron's authority.

8. How had the question the people raised in 17:12-13 already been answered?

Once the murmuring stopped, the dying stopped.

9. How should we relate to whatever authority we ourselves have been given?

We need to recognize it as authority under authority (Luke 7:8). We should cultivate fruitfulness in our own lives so that the people we direct can look to us with respect.

Summarizing the Lesson

"But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 17-21).

Research Guide

Jude's lengthy description of "certain men crept in unawares" (Jude 4) should warn us all, lest we become like them. Notice his reference to Korah ("Core") in verse 11.