

Lesson 8 - 12 June, 2011

The Sin of Rebellion

Lesson Scope: Numbers 15 through 19

Lesson Focus

The rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram likely took place in the wilderness near Kadesh, where Israel had refused to enter the Promised Land. Yet after God had sentenced the rebellious to die in the wilderness, they presumed to attack the Canaanites and Amalekites without divine assistance and in spite of Moses' protest. Defeat and confusion resulted.

God gave additional directives for sacrifices, commanded the stoning of a Sabbath-breaker, and bid the Israelites to make fringes on their garments with a ribbon of blue (chapter 15). In keeping with human nature, it seems very probable that this rebellion grew out of resentment of this very practical directive, given right on the heels of the verdict that they would not enter Canaan.

Korah was a first cousin of Moses and Aaron and of equal rank in the tribe. Previous to Aaron's appointment as high priest, the heads of tribes and families served as priests. Perhaps famous men who gathered with him resented their loss of position. Whatever their motives, they united around a common grievance against the God-given authority of Moses and Aaron. Rebellion is an affront to the Lord. It rises from proud ambition, defies God-ordained authority, and will ultimately fall under divine wrath.

This is a very practical lesson that every person must deal with in his own heart. We live in a generation in which society as a whole have rebelled against God. We must guard against subtle forms of rebellion, and we must reject the many false teachings about human behavior that are being promoted today. We have a great resource for dealing with rebellion that the Old Testament saints did not have—the cross of Christ. In all the issues of life, we must bring souls to the cross of Christ as the answer.

Lesson Aim: To identify truths related to rebellion.

Theme Verse: [Isaiah 30:1](#). Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me: and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin.

Lesson Text:

"Ye Take Too Much Upon You"

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 16:3

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 16:8-10

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

Numbers 16:12-13

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?

"They Perished From Among the Congregation"

Numbers 16:25-26

And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶And 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 16:32-33

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. ³³They, 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.

Numbers 16:35

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

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 16:48

And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

"The Rod of Aaron ... Budded"

Numbers 17:6

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.

Numbers 17:8

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.

Numbers 17:10

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

"Ye Take Too Much Upon You"

1. What charges did the rebels bring against Moses and Aaron?
2. Why was it so serious for Korah to seek the office of priest?
3. What practical warnings can we receive from this uprising?

"They Perished From Among the Congregation"

4. What lesson should Israel have learned from God's judgment on the rebels?
5. How was Aaron a type of Christ in this event?
6. Why must we separate ourselves from rebellious persons?
7. How must we deal with rebellion in our day?

"The Rod of Aaron ... Budded"

8. What truth did Aaron's budding rod illustrate?

9. What is the blessing of living in submission?

Analyzing the Passage

God had provided for man's holiness through the priesthood of Aaron through this rebellion, Korah declared the people holy without Aaron's high priesthood. Every man could be his own priest. Korah rejected God's plan of salvation.

Korah declared God's presence among the rebellious, even though their defeat by the Canaanites proved otherwise (Numbers 14:42-45).

Dathan and Abiram accused Moses of tyranny and unfairness (Numbers 16:14). They accused Moses for what was entirely their own fault failure to enter Canaan (Numbers 16:13-14). So unjust were their accusations that Moses, the meekest man, became wroth (Numbers 16:15). Their movement was against the man who had saved their lives by his intercession to God for them. The catastrophic deaths of the company of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram should have silenced the gainsaying.

The seriousness of this rebellion was manifested the very next day when Moses and Aaron were accused of killing "the people of the LORD. Only after a plague killed 14,700 more persons, and God caused Aaron's rod to bud, was the rebellion quenched.

In the New Testament, Korah is used to illustrate the life of apostate teachers (Jude 11). Korah had possibly been among the zealous Levites who had responded to Moses' call "Who is on the LORD's side?" (Exodus 32:26). In this lesson we see that he perished as a gainsayer. God graciously spared his children (Numbers 26:11).

Principles and Applications

"Ye Take Too Much Upon You"

1. Rebellious persons seek supporters and rally them for group action (Numbers 16:1-3). -Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished" (Proverbs 11:21). Group solidarity encourages the rebellious. In fact, group unity has often been used to establish positions in rebellion against God's commandment as in cases where once-sound church groups were moved into apostasy.

2. Those in rebellion against God's leadership may actually be leaders themselves (Numbers 16:1-2). These men held places of far greater influence in Israel than they admitted. Their prominence became a snare to

many who failed to discern their error and followed them as they had safely followed before. Praying for the spiritual stability of our leaders is actually praying for our own spiritual safety.

3. Accusing God-ordained leadership is rebellion (Numbers 16:3). Why are leaders who stand for historic, Biblical truth too often criticized, disrespected, and undermined? Why do some members try to "see what they can get by with" Or why do they make exceptions for themselves or influence others to disregard the standards? Such actions cloud the testimony of the church. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

4. Dissatisfaction with God's call of responsibility leads to rebellion (Numbers 16:8-10). It is essential that we fulfill our own responsibility faithfully in the fear of God rather than envy the position of others. The work of God is great, and every part is important. All cannot be leaders, but everyone is needed. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:1 1-13).

5. Failure to hear and respond to counsel is rebellion (Numbers 16:12). "He that hateth reproof is brutish (Proverbs 12:1). Fathers who give sound counsel and attempt to maintain a disciplined family life must be supported, and the youth who accept that counsel should be commended. Children need to respect and honor the counsel of parents by obedience throughout life. Without the stable anchor of sound counsel for our lives, we will become insensitive to truth.

6. Rebellious peoples accusation against leadership (Numbers 10:13). They become willing to believe a falsehood because it seems to excuse their sin. They blame others, especially leaders, for making it hard for them or for making people feel bad, even while the accused have agonized for others' salvation.

"They Perished From Among the Congregation"

7. Rebellion is wickedness (Numbers 16:26). We may not excuse rebellion as "immaturity," another perspective, "cultural difference" or "the way he has always been".- Such things do exist and they require Christian growth to change them, but to excuse rebellion is to harden the conscience and de-

ceive the soul.

8. The righteous must separate from the rebellious to avoid inclusion in their judgment (Numbers 10:25-26). "A companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20). We will spend eternity with those we have kept company with. If we support rebellious persons, we place ourselves in the same position. Rebellion spreads like an epidemic. If we socialize with those who have rebelled against sound church life, we will be contaminated with their attitudes.

9. Rebellion brings God's judgment (Numbers 10:32-33, 35). "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1). Many divine judgments fall on rebellious persons in this life as warnings, yet many seem to make out well. "But we are sure that the judgement of God is according to truth against them which commit such things" (Romans 2:2).

10. Atonement for rebellion is required to stop divine wrath (Numbers 16:46, 48). Rebellion can be forgiven if one fully repents of it, but a rebellious person will need to return to his parents, teachers, and church where he first went wrong and correct matters. To rebel in one church setting, escape the issues by finding a more tolerant group, and suddenly have a glowing testimony for the Lord does not absolve anyone of his accountability for rebelling.

"The Rod of Aaron ... Budded"

11. Living in submission to God approved leadership brings fruitfulness (Numbers 17:6, 8). Where submission rules, children grow up in security, young people blossom in stability, and parents safely guide the home with stability with support of the church. Just as rebellion begets rebellion, so submission fosters submission.

12. Submission delivers the soul from death (Numbers 17.-10). We give our children the greatest gift of life when we teach them submission. "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt heat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:13.-14).

Important Teachings

1. Rebellious persons seek supporters and rally them for group action (Numbers 16:1, 3).
2. Those in rebellion against God's leadership may actually be leaders themselves (Numbers 16:1-2).
3. Accusing God-ordained leadership is rebellion (Numbers 16:3).

4. Dissatisfaction with God's call of responsibility leads to rebellion (Numbers 16:8-10).
5. Failure to hear and respond to counsel is rebellion (Numbers 16:12).
6. Rebellious people bring false accusation against leadership (Numbers 16:13).
7. Rebellion is wickedness (Numbers 16:26).
8. The righteous must separate from the rebellious to avoid inclusion in their judgment (Numbers 16:25-26).
9. Rebellion brings God's judgment (Numbers 16:32-33, 35).
10. Atonement for rebellion is required to stop divine wrath (Numbers 16:46, 48).
11. Living in submission to God-approved leadership brings fruitfulness (Numbers 17:6, 8).
12. Submission delivers the soul from death (Numbers 17:10).
13. Rebellious attitudes bring confusion and deception (Numbers 16:41).

Answers to Questions

1. What charges did the rebels bring against Moses and Aaron?
They charged them with taking too much authority into their own hands, as well as with having an improper view of the place of the congregation in decision making. They charged Moses with evil in bringing them out of Egypt. They charged Moses with tyrannical motives and dictatorial aspirations.
2. Why was it so serious for Korah to seek the office of priest?
God may be approached only in His own approved manner. To approach God on man's terms is presumptions. To reject Aaron's high priesthood was to reject God's only way of salvation. In type, Korah rejected Jesus Christ. Korah's view of holiness was man's view, not God's view. In our terms we might see Korah as a humanist who believed in man's inherent goodness and ability to find God by himself: To rebel against those whom God has placed in authority is to rebel against God Himself.
3. What practical warnings can we receive from this uprising?
We must be careful not to follow influential people with new, conflicting ideas. Beware of those who give persuasive speeches and lead against the godly leaders and practices of the church. Those who declare leadership unnecessary, because everyone is holy and can decide for themselves, are false teachers. We should not be dissatisfied with our calling and work in life. We should beware of accusing others with having bad motives.
4. What lessons should Israel have learned from God's judgment on the re-

bels?

God's judgment is swift and certain. The unusual nature of their death was to vindicate Moses and show this as an act of God (Numbers 16:28-30). This unusual death was to show the exceeding sinfulness of their sin. The fire that devoured the men offering incense vindicated the position of Aaron.

5. How was Aaron a type of Christ in this event?

The incense Aaron offered was an atonement for their sin. Incense is also a type of prayer. Aaron made intercession for those who spoke against him even as Christ interceded for those who killed Him.

6. Why must we separate ourselves from rebellious persons?

Because of our carnal nature, we are susceptible to rebellious attitudes. If we associate with rebellious persons, we may be deceived by their fair words and ultimately share in their judgment. If we keep company with the rebellious, God may rightly judge us with them.

7. How must we deal with rebellion in our day?

First, we must call rebellion sin so that souls are convicted of it. Rebellion may be forgiven, but repentance, confession, and restitution will be necessary. The restrictions against which a person rebelled must be accepted in order to find peace with God.

8. What truth did Aaron's budding rod illustrate?

Aaron's budding rod symbolized the blessing, beauty, and fruitfulness of submission to God's plan of salvation through Aaron's high priesthood.

9. What is the blessing of living in submission?

By living in submission to God and His leaders, our souls are saved from death, and the feet of our children are guided in the way of life.

Summarizing the Lesson

Rebellion is the root of all the expressions of man's carnal heart. It remained a problem throughout all Old Testament history. Rebellion can be curbed by training, but it can only be cured by conversion. The cross of Christ can break our stony heart and give us a heart of flesh. Praise God!

Research Guide

1. Read the Book of Jude to see how Jude classified the life and influence of Korah.

2. See "Korah" in Nelson's New, Illustrated Bible Dictionary.