

Dear brothers and Sisters,

This chapter of Numbers describes the final provocation committed by the Israelites who came out of Egypt that led to the Almighty's decision to disallow their entry into the Promised Land. After the defeat of the disobedient Israelites who had decided to enter the Promised Land anyway, regardless of what Moses had warned them not to do. They disobeyed and the Canaanites and the Amalekites came down from the surrounding hills and attacked the rebels and chased them away scattering them over a 10 mile area. It was a disastrous retreat and the surviving members made their way back to the camp of Israel where they pleaded for forgiveness. But this time they had gone too far, and Yahweh rejected these people from ever entering the Promised Land and condemned them to die in the wilderness. However some of the tribe of Levi would not accept this and decided to rebel against the God appointed leadership of Moses and Aaron and his sons. It was both a religious and a political revolt.

Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben (Num 16:1) Korah incited his fellow Levites to join the revolt while Dathan and Abiram stirred up the Reubenites. These rose up before Moses together with 250 princes of the assembly. These are referred to in the Book of Jude where the apostle describes them as "leaving their estate" that is they turned their backs to their honoured position and challenge Moses and Aaron intending to take their place in leading the people. So they accused Moses and Aaron of assuming too much authority, for they claimed, "all the congregation are holy" and asked. "Why do you, Aaron and Moses, lift yourselves above the congregation of Yahweh?" Hearing the accusation Moses brought his face to the ground, expressing his deep humility. A terrible crisis had been brought upon him, but he did not seek to counter the accusations

in his own way, instead he trusted that Yahweh would vindicate the work he had done for this people. He then addressed Korah and all his company stating that, "Tomorrow Yahweh will show you who are his and who is Holy and who he has chosen to come near to Him". Moses instructed them to bring their censers with fire and incense in them, and the man whom Yahweh chooses he shall be holy. Moses also reminded the Levites that God had already separated them to draw near to him in the service of the Tabernacle, together with all their brothers the sons of Levi. They already possessed offices over the congregation as teachers, why would they desire the priest hood as well? And why did they murmur against Aaron

Moses then sent a message instructing Dathan and Abiram to appear before him, hoping to dissuade them from their decision. But openly and disrespectfully they sent the message back stating "we will not come up" with an accusation regarding Moses, "Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land that flows with milk and honey to kill us in this wilderness, except that you make yourself a prince over us?"

Moses was very upset by such accusations and in his prayer to Yahweh He asks Yahweh not to respect the offering of these men, for he had not taken even an ass from them nor had he hurt anyone of them. So Moses instructed the rebels to stand before Yahweh, every man with his censor with burning incense. These men stood with their 250 censers at the door of the Tabernacle and Korah took up the challenge, gathered all the congregation and the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the congregation. Yahweh then spoke directly to Moses and Aaron saying Separate yourselves from among this congregation that I may consume them in a moment. Moses and Aaron fell to the ground and appealed on behalf of the congregation. Yahweh told Moses to appeal to the congregation to depart from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan and Abiram describing them as wicked men. The congregation obeyed but Dathan and Abiram stood with their families.

Moses then spoke to the congregation, "If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of men then Yahweh has not sent me. But if Yahweh make a new thing, and the earth swallow them up and all that appertain unto them and they go down quick into the pit, then you shall understand that these men have provoked Yahweh".

You may note that the devastating earthquake which swallowed up Dathan and Abiram was not enough to appease the Israelite's anger and feelings of revolt and the following day the congregation grumbled that Moses and Aaron had killed the people of Yahweh, but as they looked toward the tabernacle the Cloud of Yahweh's presence covered it, and the glory of Yahweh covered it. Moses and Aaron moved to place themselves between the Tabernacle and the people and saw that the plague had already broken out. Aaron who had been spurned by bitter word previously, now ran in between the people with his censer and putting incense upon it he stood between the dead and the living making an atonement for the people and the plague was stopped.

Like Israel, as we live our lives from day to day we are journeying through the wilderness of life. Our focus is to be upon Hope of the Kingdom of God and the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Like Israel we experience hard times and good time, but our Lord Jesus has taught us through his apostle Paul that having food and clothing let us be therewith content. (1Ti 6:8) One lesson we must learn from this episode is that though we may be blessed with much more than this, we should be content with our lot. Korah and his friends were jealous of Moses and Aaron's position, they wanted to control matters, and the same things can arise in Ecclesias today, where brothers forget that they are not in control, but the mind of the ecclesia must be taken into account. The call of the Gospel is not to promote leaders but for all brothers and sisters to serve to the best of their ability.

In passing it is important to note that just as divisions occurred among the chosen people, the history of the truth in these latter days has been fraught with similar discontent often leading to divisions. As

brother John Thomas pointed out, the question may be asked as to why the Almighty permitted men like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to lurk in the camp of Israel, troubling the congregation by attempting a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, instead of using His power to weed them out at the beginning of the journey, and so saved the nation from turbulence? It is because such a mode of procedure, instead of illustrating and justifying the ways of God to man, would have wrapped them in mystery, and clothed them with the appearance of impulse and injustice. Why did He so long forbear with the Jews in their obstinacy, foreknowing their ultimate rejection of all His messengers and His own Son? Why did Jesus, who discerned "spirits," tolerate Judas till he convicted himself by betraying his master? Why did the Spirit suffer Annanias and Saphira to come into the presence of the Apostles, and go through the formality of hearing their own condemnation, before their dishonesty was punished with death? In fact, why do things happen at all as they do? Why did not God frame the earthly arrangement things on such a basis that obedience and not disobedience should have been the law? The whole history of divine procedure, in relation to human affairs, shows that divine omniscience is never allowed for a moment to forestall or displace the natural order of events, but rather sets up and enforces the law.