

Message #17

Numbers 16:1-50

In any society blessed by God, there must be God-ordained and appointed leadership and there must be proper subordination to that leadership. The leadership has the responsibility to obey the Word of God and the people have the responsibility to submit to the leadership obeying the Word of God.

But when we study the Bible, we discover that some people don't like that. That is true in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Absalom didn't like it. He wanted authority from his father David (II Sam. 15). Diotrephes didn't like it; he wanted preeminence in the local church (III John 9-10). Satan didn't like it, in fact, that is what got him expelled from heaven.

It does not matter the dispensation, if anyone decides they are going to try to undermine and overthrow and impeach a leader who has been sovereignly appointed by God, it will not end good for them.

This is a very famous story in the book of Numbers that truly shows this point. In fact, in the New Testament, Jude actually refers to this story and actually names Korah as an example of a self-seeking, arrogant man, who was executed and perished as a judgment of God (Jude 11-12). That story is told right here in Numbers 16 and the lesson is simple to see:

PEOPLE WHO ATTEMPT TO OVERRIDE AND OVERTHROW GOD'S AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP WILL FACE GOD'S SERIOUS JUDGMENT.

Numbers 16 describes a major rebellion against the God-ordained and God-appointed leadership of Moses and Aaron. In fact, this was a rebellion that had impeachment in view. They wanted Moses and Aaron out of office and they wanted to overthrow them.

This was a very real and very serious attempt to overthrow God's leaders so God sent one of the most ferocious judgments against those who did the wrong. There are nine parts to this:

PART #1 – Korah and company rise up against Moses and Aaron. 16:1-3

The main antagonist in this rebellion was a man named Korah. Korah was the son of Izhar, a Kohathite from the tribe of Levi. He must have been someone important because many people were willing to follow him. **His goal was to take charge of Israel by self-appointment.**

Now the Kohathites held a sacred priestly position. They were the ones responsible for moving the sacred objects of the Tabernacle such as the Ark of the Covenant (7:9). But these priests were not content with that. They were not content with their appointed roles, so they decided to do something about it.

According to **verse 1**, three Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram and On, headed up a rebellion. They got about 250 other chosen leaders of the congregation to go up against Moses and Aaron. **By the way, these who unite together against Moses, will die together as a judgment of God.**

In **verse 3**, they assembled together to question the authority of Moses and Aaron. They had the arrogant audacity to say, “you have gone far enough.” They concluded the entire congregation was holy and there was no more need of their leadership. This is a mutiny attempt to overthrow God’s leadership.

They apparently forgot about the fact that God is the One who sent Moses to get them and God had done amazing things through Moses, which He had never done with any of them; so they wanted the power and decided to take it.

In fact, they falsely accused Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves. Moses and Aaron never exalted themselves; Moses didn’t even want the job of leading Israel; but God is the One who chose him and gave him the position.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe made a very interesting observation about this. He said whenever you have people complaining and rebelling against God’s leader, there is usually a stated reason and then there is a hidden reason (*Be Counted*, p. 91). The stated reason was these two were running things when there should be more of a congregational democracy. The hidden reason was Korah was jealous and wanted to be priest.

But the truth is Moses was God’s man and if you speak out or stand against a true man of God like Moses, there will be a price to pay. He was God’s man to take this nation to the ultimate blessings of God and because of a Satanic jealousy, they wanted Moses gone.

I know of a case where a man opposed a good pastor. He was a friend of mine who is now with the Lord. The stated reason the man opposed my friend is that he claimed he was a dictator, which was not true. The real hidden reason was this man was in terrible sin and the minister knew it.

PART #2 – Moses responds to Korah and his company of rebels. 16:4-18

When Korah did this, Moses had five main responses:

Response #1 - Moses fell on his face. 16:4

The first response of Moses is not to argue or debate with Korah. He does not try to reason with him; he fell on his face before God. Again, the people who should have been on their faces before God were those doing the wrong, but it is Moses who is down before God and he is praying to God for His wisdom and His will. We do not know how long Moses was down before God, but when he got up he had received a message from God, which he communicated:

Response #2 - Moses spoke to Korah and his rebel group. **16:5-11**

God gave Moses wisdom and he communicated five messages to them:

(Message #1) - Tomorrow morning the LORD will show His true leader. **16:5**

Moses said God will deal with you tomorrow. There are times when people will lash out against you, criticize you, stand against you, challenge you. You don't have to respond immediately, the same day. Frankly, it is wise not to respond immediately. There is nothing wrong with saying I think I'll let God deal with you tomorrow.

(Message #2) - Take censers and put fire in them before the presence of the Lord tomorrow.
16:6-7

Since you have alleged all people are all equal, God will show whether or not that is true. We will just go to the tabernacle tomorrow and find out. One would think that they would have remembered what happened to Nadab and Abihu when they brought a censer before the Lord (Lev.10), they both ended up dead.

The test will be offering incense before the Lord, which is a dangerous test. Moses said take the censers, put incense in them and bring them into the presence of God tomorrow and you will see who God truly sanctions.

Now you would think this would be enough for some people to say, wait a minute, we do remember Nadab and Abihu, we want out of this deal. But their arrogance was such that they would play this out completely.

Frankly, the thought of judgment coming tomorrow should alter rebellious thinking.

(Message #3) - You are not content with the sacred responsibility God has given to you.
16:8-10a

Moses says you are so arrogant that you don't think your job of moving and serving the tabernacle is very important. Here God set you apart to take care of the sacred tabernacle and you apparently think that isn't a good enough job for you.

Whenever God gives someone a responsibility, it is never unimportant and when you start viewing it that way, you have a very serious problem on your hands and in your heart.

(Message #4) - You are seeking to take over the priesthood and you are against God.
16:10b-11a

God is the One who determines who has different gifts and appointments. These guys wanted "power and prestige and position." Moses says your attitude is "against the LORD."

Now you would think that it would be enough for Moses to rebuke them and they would say we have sinned. But that is not what happens. Pride always goes before destruction (Prov. 16:18).

(Message #5) - You have even opposed Aaron. 16:11b

This opposition against Aaron is really an opposition against God. They want to be high priest like Aaron and they are opposing the appointments of God.

Response #3 - Moses calls Dathan and Abiram to appear before him. 16:12-14

Moses called Dathan and Abiram to appear, but they would not do it. This is the way spiritual weasels work. They want to hide out and not face the music. They decided they would not go. Instead they railed against Moses and said you are the one who has led us up out of Egypt and brought us into this wilderness and all you want to do is lord your power over us (v. 13). In **verse 14**, they continue to run their mouths against what they considered to be the “failed leadership of Moses.”

What is so sad is that these guys are so confused they call Egypt the land of “milk and honey.” It was the land of baby killing and slavery. This is how arrogance can color reality.

Then they said you have failed and you have not brought us to a plush land and you have not given us our promised inheritance in the land and therefore all you want to do is put out the eyes of those who see clearly.

Response #4 - Moses responds to Dathan and Abiram by praying to God. 16:15

I love one commentator who said, “Moses the meek man becomes Moses the angry man.” The one thing a man of God can always do is pray and name the person doing harm. That is exactly what Moses does; He asks God not to accept their offerings that He would appease His wrath. Moses said I have not taken one thing from him nor have I done any harm to them. Moses did not want these two ever connected to him or those sacrifices ever again.

Response #5 - Moses responds to Korah and his company. 16:16-18

Moses reinforced the idea that they need to bring a fire pan with incense on it to the tent of meeting the next day. Moses says you bring your arrogance and your firepans to the doorway of the tent of meeting tomorrow and we will see who is right with God and who isn't.

PART #3 – Korah and the congregation assembled themselves and the glory of God appeared. 16:19

Probably when the presence of God appeared, Korah and his rebels thought this is great.

PART #4 – God spoke to Moses and Aaron. **16:20-22**

This is so interesting because God does not even speak to Korah and his rebels. He spoke to Moses and Aaron and He said get away from them because I am going to instantly kill them.

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces and appealed that God would not do that because of one arrogant man Korah.

PART #5 – God spoke to Moses again. **16:23-24**

God is speaking to Moses, not these arrogant self-appointed leaders. God told Moses to tell the congregation to get back from around the dwelling places of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

PART #6 – Moses went with the elders of Israel to the home of Dathan and Abiram. **16:25-30**

They refused to go so Moses went to them and he spoke to the congregation:

(Message #1) - Moses said depart from the tents of these wicked men and do not touch anything they have or you will be judged in their sin. **16:26-27**

So the people got back from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and they came out with their wives and sons and little ones. Do you see this? When you even talk about impeaching a true leader of God, that one is wicked in God's estimation.

(Message #2) - Moses said here is how you will know that the Lord sent me to lead you. **16:28-30**

Now we need to remember that a death sentence has been put on all Israelites who are 20 years of age and older. What is discussed here is an immediate execution of those arrogant.

Proof #1 - If these men die naturally like all men die, the Lord has not sent me. **16:29**

Moses says if these men die of natural causes, then Moses said I have not been sent by God.

Proof #2 - If these men die by God opening the ground and swallowing them and their families, you will know God did send me. **16:30**

PART #7 – God executes all those who rebelled against Moses and Aaron. **16:31-35**

God opened the earth and the earth swallowed up all of them and lightning came out of heaven and killed the 250 men offering the incense.

PART #8 – God tells Moses to command Eleazar to collect the sacred censers and hammer them into sheets to cover the altar as a reminder of this. **16:36-40**

These sheets would be a constant reminder that you do not want to rebel against God-appointed leadership or you get hammered with serious judgment.

PART #9 – The people grumble against Moses and Aaron because the people died. **16:41-50**

Apparently a group of Israelites started talking among themselves and decided to head toward the tent of meeting to protest the fact that their fellow people had died.

God told Moses and Aaron to get way from the assembly and then God killed 14,700 with a plague.

A. W. Tozer said do not follow a leader until it has been clearly established that God has anointed him and gifted him to be a leader. But if God does establish one has been gifted and established as a leader, never follow someone who would seek to overthrow him.