

Power Struggle



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 17:10–17, Numbers 16, 17, Josh. 4:3–9, Matt. 26:13, Luke 22:19.*

Memory Text: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (*Proverbs 16:18*).

An ill-disguised hatred against Moses and Aaron still rankled in the hearts of the multitude. To be condemned to wander in the wilderness until the first generation out of Egypt died seemed more than many of them could bear. Instead of submitting to God's judgment, some began to plot how they could rid themselves of the two brothers, as if somehow these two men, and not God, were the ones responsible for this situation.

“Korah, the leading spirit in this movement, was a Levite, of the family of Kohath, and a cousin of Moses; he was a man of ability and influence. Though appointed to the service of the tabernacle, he had become dissatisfied with his position and for some time . . . had been secretly opposing the authority of Moses and Aaron. . . . He finally conceived the bold design of overthrowing both the civil and the religious authority.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 395.

This week's lesson should be a powerful reminder to us of the corruptness of the human heart. Pride, jealousy, and love of power, if cherished and left to fester, can manifest themselves in horrific ways. God alone knows how much pain, suffering, and loss have resulted and will result from those who, knowing better, allow these bitter seeds to bear their harvest. May we learn from the mistakes seen here and not make the same ones ourselves.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 14.*

Rebellion (Again)

Read Numbers 16:1–3. Read carefully the rebels’ words to Moses. What four lies are found there?

Moses’ reaction to this attack (*vs.* 4) reveals just how frustrated he must have felt at such twisted and distorted charges, especially by those who should have known better. “They were of the number who went up with Moses into the mount and beheld the divine glory. . . . Professing great interest in the prosperity of the people, they first whispered their discontent to one another and then to leading men of Israel. Their insinuations were so readily received that they ventured still further, and at last they really believed themselves to be actuated by zeal for God.” —Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 396, 397.

Here, again, we see the manifestation of Satan’s original sin in heaven. No matter how exalted these men and princes were, or the high positions that they held, it wasn’t enough for them. They wanted more.

How careful we must be!

What else was behind their rebellion? Why, too, were these charges so utterly false? *Num.* 16:12–14.

What’s so incredible are the words of these men, calling Egypt (Egypt!) the land flowing “with milk and honey.” It’s amazing how sin was so able to pervert their judgment that the country of their slavery and bondage was now referred to by them in terms that represented God’s Promised Land!

What are ways in which we deceive ourselves, ways in which we rationalize or justify our sins and wrong deeds? How can we protect ourselves against this sad and dangerous spiritual trap?

If the Lord Creates Something New

Look at Moses' reaction to these men (*Num. 16:4–11*). Despite the exalted position that they had been given, they wanted more. Moses clearly saw that.

Even more important, if you listened to their words, it seemed as if they were rebelling against Moses and Aaron, as if these two, of themselves, had usurped all this authority, had overstepped their bounds, and had exalted themselves over everyone else, as well as having led them into the wilderness to kill them.

In reality, however, who were they truly rebelling against? *Num. 16:11*.

Again, one has to wonder where these men came up with such false charges. Whose power split the Red Sea—God's, or Moses and Aaron's? Who brought manna for them every morning—God, or Moses and Aaron? Who was it that manifested the cloud by day and the fire by night—God, or Moses and Aaron? It's hard to imagine how, with all that they had witnessed, they could have acted as they did.

Read Numbers 16:15–35. Notice Moses' words in verses 28–30. What is Moses saying that shows what the real issue was?

Think of their situation. If these men had been able to incite a wider rebellion, who knows the horrible consequences that could have come. The children of Israel, as it were, hardly grounded in the Lord as they should be, easily could have gone totally astray. They had to know that the Lord was in control, that the Lord was the One who was leading them, and that Moses and Aaron were doing what God had called them to do and were not acting in their own behalf. All this should have been obvious, but again, sin has a powerful way of clouding our minds. The spirit of rebellion, once fostered, is hard to quell and often takes on a momentum all its own.

How susceptible are you to feelings of envy regarding those who have position or authority over you? What can you learn from Christ's example that could help you overcome this potentially ruinous sentiment?

Memorials

Archaeological research in Palestine has not uncovered many written materials (other than the Dead Sea scrolls), yet the Scriptures refer to a variety of memorials as visible signs to recall continuously to Israel's memory their meaning. For instance, in Genesis 28:11–22, Jacob set up a stone memorial in order to remember the covenant promises that God had made to him and to his descendants.

How was this terrible rebellion against Moses and Aaron memorialized? *Num. 16:36–40*. What especially was this memorial to remind them of?

Most of the memorials mentioned in the Old Testament reminded Israel of God's will, His goodness, grace, and covenant blessings. They pointed the person Godward, upward, toward the Lord. For example, the rainbow after the Flood (*Gen. 9:13*), circumcision (*Gen. 17:10–17*), the Passover festival (*Num. 9:1–14*), the blue tassels on their clothing (*Num. 15:38–41*), or the memorial stones Joshua erected at the Jordan crossing (*Josh. 4:3–9*).

In contrast, the bronze plates in the court were a *preventative* memorial to warn a stranger or a nondescendant of Aaron from attempting to usurp the priesthood. In a broader sense, it would remind people of what happened when humans—rationalizing their own greed, ambition, and desire for power—rebelled against God. It was a memorial, warning people to “be not as Korah, and as his company” (*Num. 16:40*).

What are some other memorials you can find in the Bible, and what are their purposes? See, for instance, *Exod. 20:8–11*, *Num. 31:54*, *Matt. 26:13*, *Luke 22:19*. In what ways were the animal sacrifices a kind of memorial?

What things about the Lord and His promises do you constantly need reminding of? Why is it important to keep those promises constantly before you?

Between the Living and the Dead

We would think that the judgments that fell upon Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the 250 princes would have sobered the wilderness congregation. After all, fire was coming down from heaven and consuming some, while the earth was opening up and consuming the others. What more could the Lord have done to show His righteous indignation at such outright rebellion and apostasy?

Read Numbers 16:41–50. What should this tell us about fallen human nature? How did their accusation reflect the same accusation that Korah and the others had just made?

What this amazing account should reveal to us is that the spirit of rebellion among some of the people hadn't ended with Korah. It remained in the camp, even after all that just had happened. It's hard to understand how anyone could have acted that way, especially after what they had just witnessed. Again, this only goes to show us how once we start the slide toward rebellion and apostasy, we might find ourselves doing some very crazy and irrational things. How crucial that we, through God's grace, claiming His promises (*1 Cor. 10:13, Phil. 1:6*), die to these sentiments before they lead us toward ruin.

Read Numbers 16:48. What does the idea of Aaron standing between the living and the dead mean? How do we, in this scene, get a glimpse of what Jesus has done for us?

There are only two kinds of people in this world, the living and the dead, not the physically dead but the spiritually dead. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (*John 3:18*). Jesus stands between the living and the dead; He's the border, the transition point from one to the other. Only through Him can we go from death to life.

Are you among the living? Justify your answer.

Aaron's Rod That Budded

Although thousands had died in the rebellion stirred up by Korah, the Lord knew the issue of priestly leadership had yet to be settled. Even with all that He had done, the powerful and painful judgments poured out on the rebellious, God must have known that the people were still restless. With justification, He could have wiped them all out, though it was never His desire to do that. Even after all that had happened, the Lord still was willing to work with these people and reveal His saving grace to them.

Read Numbers 17 and answer the following questions:

- What was the reason for the test?

- How was this test to be a means of preventing further rebellion and the resulting condemnation?

- How does the reaction of the people reveal that they seem to have finally gotten the message that only certain people would be allowed to be priests?

The miracle of Aaron's staff blooming and producing almonds could not be denied. The Israelites had to admit that God had wrought a miracle within the tabernacle that, once and for all, designated Aaron and his descendants as the priests of the Lord's sanctuary. The tragedy is that it cost so much suffering to get the point across. What's amazing is that the Lord was willing to do even more for them in order to set them straight.

From our perspective, it's so easy to condemn and judge the Hebrews. Yet, what if we look at ourselves, individually (2 Cor. 3:15)? Why is it often so hard for us to learn the lessons that God seeks to teach us? Why, even when we have been given more than enough evidence of God's love and grace, do we fail to trust Him? Why do we make the same mistakes again and again? Even more important, why is it crucial that we not seek to justify our mistakes?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Rebellion of Korah,” pp. 395–405, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“I question whether genuine rebellion is ever curable. . . .

“Rebellion and apostasy are in the very air we breathe. We shall be affected by it unless we by faith hang our helpless souls upon Christ. If men are so easily misled, how will they stand when Satan shall personate Christ, and work miracles? Who will be unmoved by his misrepresentations? Professing to be Christ when it is only Satan assuming the person of Christ, and apparently working the works of Christ? What will hold God’s people from giving their allegiance to false Christs? ‘Go not ye after them.’

“The doctrines must be plainly understood. The men accepted to teach the truth must be anchored; then their vessel will hold against storm and tempest, because the anchor holds them firmly. The deceptions will increase, and we are to call rebellion by its right name. We are to stand with the whole armor on.” —Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1114.

Discussion Questions:

1 What are ways in which sin deceives us? How can we know if we are being deceived by it? (After all, isn’t part of the deception of sin to make us think that actually we’re not being deceived?) What role does the Bible play in answering this question? How can others help us, as well?

2 However open and outright the rebellion we looked at this week, what are other ways that the same spirit can be manifest among us? How can we recognize it when it arises among ourselves, especially when it’s often cloaked under guises that make us think we’re not rebelling really, but instead, really standing up for what is right? How do we know the difference?

3 Why are memorials, either religious or secular, important? What are some secular memorials common in your culture, and what do they represent?

Summary: The rebellion of Korah and his associates against Moses and Aaron was so deep-seated that God had to destroy them and their followers by earthquake, fire, and plague. This account should serve as a warning against envy and jealousy, as did the memorial bronze plates on the altar. If we would pray for our leaders and cherish what God has done for them and us, we may be spared the internal troubles that beset ancient Israel in Korah’s uprising.

Long Journey to God

by SAM ABRAHAM

Kiyasudeen grew up in a non-Christian home in India. When he was 11 years old he went to live with his aunt, who had no children. Kiyasudeen noticed that his aunt worshiped a different God. He watched as she lit a candle under a picture of a Man named Jesus and then prayed silently. Sometimes Kiyasudeen went to the room where his aunt prayed and stood before the picture of Jesus and prayed to Him too, saying, “Jesus, please take care of me.”

Three years later he returned home. He often went to the temple with his father. While his father prayed to his god, Kiyasudeen prayed to Jesus.

Then tragedy struck. Both his mother and his aunt died. Deeply depressed, Kiyasudeen climbed a small hill outside town, where he fasted and prayed for three days. “You are a holy God,” he said. “Auntie told me about the great feast in heaven. Will I be there? How will I know if I am prepared to go?”

He returned home to find a job. He needed to support himself, and he hoped to earn enough money to pay his school fees and write his school leaving exam. He found a job, but after several months the employer hadn’t paid him. When Kiyasudeen asked for his money, the man beat him and sent him away. The boy found a church, which he entered to pray. “God, be my help; educate me,” he pleaded.

The church’s pastor saw the boy and asked what he prayed for. Kiyasudeen said that he wanted to study. The pastor said, “Why don’t you go to the seminary? You can study theology and become a pastor.” Kiyasudeen accepted and enrolled in the church’s seminary. After he graduated, he began preaching.

While visiting people one day, he saw a sign outside one house that said, “Pastor, Seventh-day Adventist Church.” He asked the pastor what “seventh day” meant. The pastor explained that the seventh day is the Sabbath. Kiyasudeen was astonished. “I studied in a seminary, and no one told me about the Sabbath. Is it Sunday?”

The Adventist pastor pointed to the calendar. Kiyasudeen saw that Saturday was the seventh day. He asked the pastor to teach him, and the two studied and prayed together for three months. Then Kiyasudeen asked to be baptized.

Kiyasudeen tried to share with his family God’s love, but they rejected him. So he shares his faith with anyone who will listen.

Our mission offerings help bring the gospel of Jesus to those like Kiyasudeen who are searching for the living God. Thank you.

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