

Numbers 16:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

Korah leads a rebellion against Moses and Aaron's authority, representing one of Israel's most serious covenant violations. The ringleaders—Korah (a Levite), Dathan, Abiram, and On (Reubenites), plus 250 princes—represented significant leadership from multiple tribes, making this rebellion especially dangerous. Korah as a Levite already served in the tabernacle but desired priestly status (verse 10), revealing ambitious pride. The Reubenites' involvement may reflect their tribe's loss of primacy (Reuben was Jacob's firstborn but lost preeminence through sin). The rebellion's essence was challenging God-appointed authority under the pretense of democratic equality: 'all the congregation are holy...wherefore then lift ye up yourselves?' (verse 3). This seemingly egalitarian argument actually represented proud rejection of God's sovereign appointments. Their claim that all Israel was equally holy confused positional sanctification (all Israel was holy as God's people) with functional roles (God appoints specific offices). The rebellion demonstrates how spiritual pride disguises itself as concern for equality while actually seeking self-promotion. God's dramatic judgment—the earth swallowing the rebels—vindicated His appointed leadership and warned against challenging divinely established authority.

Historical Context

This rebellion occurred during the wilderness wandering between Sinai and Canaan. Korah was a first cousin of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 6:21), making his

rebellion especially treacherous. As a Kohathite Levite, Korah already possessed the honored role of transporting the tabernacle's most sacred objects (Numbers 4:15), yet he envied the priesthood's exclusive privileges. The rebellion's suppression was dramatic: God caused the earth to open and swallow Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their families (16:31-33), while fire consumed the 250 princes who offered unauthorized incense (16:35). The congregation's subsequent complaint against Moses and Aaron (16:41) provoked a plague that killed 14,700 before Aaron's intercession stopped it (16:46-49). God then confirmed Aaron's unique priesthood by causing his staff to bud, blossom, and produce almonds overnight (Numbers 17), providing visible proof of divine appointment. This incident established the principle that challenging God-appointed authority invites divine judgment. The Korahite line continued through descendants who later served as temple singers and psalmists (Psalms 42-49, 84-85, 87-88 are 'Psalms of the sons of Korah').

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Korah's rebellion warn against ambitious pride disguised as concern for equality and inclusion?
2. What does God's dramatic judgment teach about His view of challenges to divinely appointed authority?

Interlinear Text

וָקַח	כֹּהֵן	בְּנֵי	יִצְחָק	בְּנֵי	קֹהֵת	בְּנֵי	לֵוִי
took	Now Korah	sons	of Izhar	sons	of Kohath	sons	of Levi
H3947	H7141	H1121	H3324	H1121	H6955	H1121	H3878
וַדָּת	וְאַבִּירָם	בְּנֵי	אֶלְיָב	וְאֹן	בְּנֵי	פֶּלֶת	בְּנֵי
and Dathan	and Abiram	sons	of Eliab	and On	sons	of Peleth	sons
H1885	H48	H1121	H446	H203	H1121	H6431	H1121
רְאוּבֵן:							
of Reuben							
H7205							

Additional Cross-References

Jude 1:11 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Exodus 6:21 (Parallel theme): And the sons of Izhar; Korah, and Nepheg, and Zichri.

Deuteronomy 11:6 (Parallel theme): And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel:

Exodus 6:18 (Parallel theme): And the sons of Kohath; Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel: and the years of the life of Kohath were an hundred thirty and three years.

Numbers 27:3 (Parallel theme): Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons.