

Numbers 16:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

Analysis

And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: This verse introduces Korah's rebellion, one of the most serious challenges to divinely appointed leadership in Israel's history. "They rose up before Moses" uses the Hebrew qum (עַמַּקְ), meaning to arise, stand, or establish oneself—here with hostile intent, indicating rebellion against authority. The phrase "before Moses" (lifnei Moshe, לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה) suggests confrontational positioning, standing against rather than under his leadership.

The description of the rebels emphasizes their human credentials: "princes of the assembly" (nesiey edah, נְשֵׁיאֵי עַדָּה), leaders of the congregation; "famous" (qeriyey moed, קְרִיאֵי מוֹעֵד), literally 'called ones of the assembly,' those summoned to councils; "men of renown" (anshey shem, אֲנָשִׁים שֵׁם), literally 'men of name,' people with reputation and standing. The number 250 indicates substantial support for this challenge. Their prestigious positions made the rebellion particularly dangerous and their judgment particularly exemplary.

This revolt illustrates the peril of prestigious people presuming on their status to challenge God's appointed order. Despite impressive human credentials, these leaders lacked divine appointment. Their rebellion wasn't merely against Moses and Aaron but against God Himself (Numbers 16:11), demonstrating that religious populism and democratic sentiment cannot override divine authority. The tragic

outcome warns against using worldly status to justify spiritual pride and presumption.

Historical Context

This rebellion occurred during Israel's wilderness wandering (approximately 1444 BCE), following the judgment at Kadesh-Barnea where Israel's unbelief resulted in forty years of wandering. The rebellion had three components: Korah and fellow Levites challenged Aaron's exclusive priesthood (Numbers 16:3, 8-11), Dathan and Abiram from the tribe of Reuben challenged Moses's civil leadership (16:12-14), and 250 laymen joined in demanding priestly privileges.

The rebels' complaint—'all the congregation is holy' (16:3)—had superficial validity (Exodus 19:6) but ignored God's establishment of distinct roles within His holy people. Korah, a Levite from the Kohathite clan, already had privileged service (carrying the tabernacle's holiest items), yet coveted the high priesthood. This demonstrates that proximity to God's presence can breed presumption rather than humility.

The dramatic judgment—the earth opening to swallow Korah's household, fire consuming the 250 men offering incense—vindicated God's appointed order. The subsequent plague (16:41-50) killed 14,700 more who sympathized with the rebels. This event became a permanent warning against challenging God's established authority (Numbers 26:9-10, Jude 11). Archaeological evidence of earthquake activity in the region confirms the geological mechanism God could have employed for this judgment.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What dangers does this passage reveal about using human credentials or popular support to challenge divine authority?
2. How can proximity to spiritual privileges breed presumption rather than humble gratitude?
3. What distinguishes legitimate concerns about leadership from rebellious challenges to God-ordained authority?
4. How does this narrative inform Christian understanding of church leadership and submission to authority?
5. What warning does Korah's rebellion provide about confusing positional holiness with functional roles in God's service?

Interlinear Text

וְיָמָשׁ יְמִינָה לְפָנָי וְיָקַר מִזְבֵּחַ
And they rose up before Moses men of the children of Israel and fifty
H6965 H6440 H4872 H582 H1121 H3478 H2572

מִזְבֵּחַ דָּמָעַת יְמִינָה כָּרְאָה עַד הַנְּשִׂיאָה וְמִמְּאַת יְמִינָה
two hundred princes of the assembly famous in the congregation men
H3967 H5387 H5712 H7148 H4150 H582

שְׁמָךְ:
of renown
H8034

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 26:9 (References Moses): And the sons of Eliab; Nemuel, and Dathan, and Abiram. This is that Dathan and Abiram, which were famous in the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the LORD:

Ezekiel 23:10 (Parallel theme): These discovered her nakedness: they took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword: and she became famous among women; for they had executed judgment upon her.

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