

Numbers 16:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

Analysis

Korah's public challenge to Moses and Aaron reveals the theological error underlying the rebellion: confusing corporate sanctification with functional offices. Their claim 'all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them' was technically true—Israel as a nation was set apart to God, and His presence dwelt among them. However, this didn't mean all possessed equal roles or authority. God establishes offices and appoints specific individuals to fill them; democratizing holy offices contradicts divine sovereignty. The rhetorical question 'wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?' falsely accuses Moses and Aaron of self-promotion, ignoring that God appointed them. This argument's appeal to equality and brotherhood sounds virtuous but actually represents pride refusing to submit to God-ordained structure. The rebellion illustrates how egalitarian rhetoric can mask ambitious power-seeking. Similar arguments appear whenever human authority is challenged by appealing to abstract equality while ignoring God's sovereign right to establish offices and appoint officers. The proper response isn't eliminating distinctions but recognizing them as God's ordering of His people for effective function.

Historical Context

The rebellion occurred in the context of Israel's established hierarchical structure: Moses as supreme prophet and civil leader, Aaron as high priest, the Aaronic family as priests, the Levites as tabernacle servants, and the twelve tribes as the general congregation. This divinely appointed structure was recent—established during the previous year at Sinai. Korah's challenge represented an early attempt to overthrow this order, potentially returning to pre-Sinai patterns where patriarchs and firstborns exercised priestly functions. Ancient Near Eastern cultures generally featured hierarchical religious and civil structures with designated priests and rulers. Israel's unique feature was that God Himself directly appointed leaders rather than leaving office to human choice or hereditary succession apart from divine command. The rebellion's suppression established that God's appointments are non-negotiable and that challenging them constitutes rebellion against God Himself. This principle would recur throughout Israel's history whenever individuals challenged divinely appointed kings, prophets, or priests.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does confusing corporate sanctification (all believers are holy) with functional offices (God appoints specific roles) cause problems in churches today?
2. What does this rebellion teach about how egalitarian rhetoric can mask ambitious self-seeking?

Interlinear Text

אֶתְכֶּם וְאֶתְבָּנָה	וְאֶתְבָּנָה	עַל	מֵשֶׁה	עַל	אֶתְכֶּם וְאֶתְבָּנָה
And they gathered themselves together		H5921	against Moses	H5921	and against Aaron
H6950		H4872			H175
וַיֹּאמֶר וְאָמַר	וְאָמַר	בְּכָל	לְכָמָד	כִּי	כִּי
and said	H413	unto them	Ye take too much	H0	H3588
H559		H7227			H3605
בְּעֵדֶךְ	בְּעֵדֶךְ	כִּי	מִבְּתוּךְ	מִבְּתוּךְ	מִבְּתוּךְ
upon you seeing all the congregation	H5712	H3605	are holy	is among	H8432
			H6918		
וְאַתֶּם וְאַתֶּתֶם	וְאַתֶּם וְאַתֶּתֶם	תַּתְנִשְׂא וְ	תַּתְנִשְׂא וְ	עַל	עַל
every one of them and the LORD	H3068	H4069	them wherefore then lift ye up	H5375	H5921
כִּי	כִּי	וְאַתֶּם וְאַתֶּתֶם	וְאַתֶּם וְאַתֶּתֶם	וְאַתֶּם וְאַתֶּתֶם	וְאַתֶּם וְאַתֶּתֶם
yourelves above the congregation	H6951		every one of them and the LORD	H3068	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 106:16 (Holy): They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.

Exodus 19:6 (Holy): And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Numbers 14:14 (References Lord): And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

Numbers 16:7 (Holy): And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.

