

Numbers 16:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.

Analysis

And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This verse stands at the heart of one of Scripture's most sobering rebellions against divinely appointed authority. Moses' response to Korah's challenge demonstrates profound spiritual wisdom and restraint. Rather than asserting his own authority, Moses appeals to God's sovereignty in choosing His servants.

The Hebrew phrase *bakar* (בָּקָר, "chosen") emphasizes divine election—God alone determines who may approach Him in priestly service. Moses understands that the priesthood is not a democratic position to be seized by popular demand, but a sacred office granted by divine appointment. The phrase "to morrow the LORD will shew" (vayashkem Yahweh yoda) reveals Moses' confidence that God Himself will vindicate His choice, removing the burden of self-defense from Moses' shoulders.

Theologically, this passage establishes crucial principles:

1. spiritual authority derives from divine calling, not human ambition
2. approaching God requires holiness defined by His standards, not ours

3. rebellion against God-appointed leadership is ultimately rebellion against God Himself
4. God will defend His own choices and vindicate His servants in His timing.

The New Testament echoes this when it warns against taking the office of teacher lightly (James 3:1) and emphasizes that Christ was appointed by God as High Priest (Hebrews 5:4-6).

Historical Context

Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16) occurred during Israel's wilderness wandering, approximately one year after the golden calf incident and the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. Korah was himself a Levite from the Kohathite clan, responsible for carrying the most sacred tabernacle objects (Numbers 4:15). However, only Aaron's descendants could serve as priests who offered sacrifices and entered the Holy Place.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, priestly offices often carried significant power, prestige, and material benefits. Korah's complaint that "all the congregation are holy" (16:3) may have resonated with democratic impulses, but it fundamentally misunderstood the nature of Israel's theocracy. The rebellion included 250 leaders, suggesting widespread discontent with the established hierarchy. Archaeological evidence from ancient Israel shows that priestly families maintained distinct social and economic positions.

The severity of God's judgment—the earth swallowing the rebels and fire consuming the 250 leaders—served as a perpetual warning (Numbers 26:10). Bronze censers from the rebels were hammered into a covering for the altar as a memorial (Numbers 16:38-40), likely a physical reminder that persisted for generations. This event established definitively that approaching God required proper authorization, foreshadowing Christ's unique qualification as our mediator.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does this passage challenge our modern assumptions about equality and authority in spiritual matters?
2. In what ways might we be tempted, like Korah, to seek spiritual positions or recognition that God has not granted us?
3. What does Moses' restraint in letting God vindicate him teach us about responding to criticism or challenges to our calling?
4. How does understanding Christ as our chosen High Priest deepen our appreciation for His unique qualification to approach God on our behalf?
5. What warnings does this passage provide about the danger of organizing opposition against God-ordained leadership in the church?

Interlinear Text

לֵאמֹר							
And he spake	H413	unto Korah	H413	כָּל	H3605	עָדֹתָו	
	H1696		H7141	אֶל		קְרָב	רִ
Even to morrow	H1242	will shew	H3045	יְהִי	H853	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא
				ה		אֲשֶׁר	בְּ
who are his and who is holy	H6918	and will cause him to come near	H7126	יְקַר	H413	אֲשֶׁר	רִ
unto him even him whom he hath chosen	H977			יְקַר	H853	אֲשֶׁר	וְ
				יְבָרֵךְ	H834	אֲלֵיכֶם	
				בְּ			
				וְ			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 65:4 (Holy): Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

Numbers 17:5 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.

Leviticus 10:3 (Holy): Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

Numbers 16:3 (Holy): 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?

2 Timothy 2:19 (References Lord): Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

Revelation 1:6 (Parallel theme): And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Acts 22:14 (Parallel theme): And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

Acts 13:2 (Holy): As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Acts 1:2 (Holy): Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

Acts 1:24 (References Lord): And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,