The Korah Rebellion and the Budding of Aaron's Staff

Numbers 16:1-50; 17:1-13

Bible Memory Verse

James 4:6

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Bible Story

The people had disobeyed. They were to wander for forty, long years in the wilderness. The story below follows those grave decisions to complain, wail, and rebel. In addition, the people were getting sick and tired of Moses and Aaron telling them what to do. I mean, who are they? Do they think they are special or something? So, like all the other times, they decided to take matters into their own hands.

Now, think for a second, even before we read this story: is this going to be a good thing challenging the leadership of Moses? Or a bad thing? Based on the previous studies of this sinful, yet human people group, I think we can make an educated, accurate guess.

Korah, a Levite, along with Dathan and Abiram were miffed. They logically deduced that if the Lord was with them all and they are all the Lord's people, then why were Moses and Aaron any more special and important than the rest. Not bad for wilderness thinking. But Moses tells them later that they were not revolting against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, but against the Lord himself. After the initial statement made by Korah challenging the authority of Moses and Aaron, Moses falls down with his face to the ground in prayer before the Lord. He knew the implications of the accusations made by Korah and his followers. Then Moses said:

> *"Tomorrow morning the Lord will show us who belongs to him and who is holy. The Lord will allow those who are chosen to enter his holy presence. You, Korah, and all your followers must do this: take incense burners, and burn incense in them tomorrow before the Lord. Then we will see whom the Lord chooses as his holy one. You Levites are the ones who have gone too far!" (Numbers 16:5-7)*

The challenge was met. Incense would be burned. And the "holy one" would be found out.

Furthermore, Moses confronted Dathan and Abiram to come out and meet with him. They flatly refused on grounds that Moses had not come through for them and they are not his subjects. *"You haven't brought us into the land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Are you trying to fool us? We will not come"* (Numbers 16:14). Interesting that they blame Moses for not getting their inheritance and not themselves. If I remember right, Moses was rather encouraging the Israelites to enter the land flowing with milk and honey, and it was the masses who believed the bad report, were afraid, and chose not to enter the Promised Land.

Moses left angry and told Korah to be there tomorrow with his 250 followers and incense burners. It was the challenge of the Wild West—high noon. So the next day came. Korah had been busy since the opening showdown, campaigning for his cause. He had rallied the whole community against Moses and Aaron and he had quite a following at the OK Corral that day. Then the cloud came over the Tabernacle and the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to the whole community and the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, *"Get away from these people so that I may instantly destroy them"* (Numbers 16:21). Meaning, the Lord wanted to destroy all the people (sound familiar?). But, Moses and Aaron fell down to the ground in prayer and interceded for the people asking the Lord to forgive them and yet punish the one man whose sin it really was. *"Then tell all the people to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram"* (Numbers 16:24), the Lord said. So Moses rushed over to their tents and told the people to get away from the wicked men (referring to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram) or they would be destroyed with them. Then Moses said if they die a natural death then the Lord had not sent him, but if they die a miraculous death like the Lord opening up the ground and swallowing them, then you will know that the Lord despises these men.

Immediately the ground opened up and swallowed the tents of Dathan and Abiram and Korah and all the followers that were with them along with everything they owned, and then the ground closed up and sealed them in the grave. Everyone started screaming thinking that the ground was going to swallow them, too. Then fire burned up the 250 followers of Korah that held the incense burners while they were holding them. Charred to a crisp. The burners were holy, but the men were not. A lot happened on these two days, but it is not over.

The next day the people gathered to protest the previous day's events and blamed them on Moses and Aaron. The two immediately fell on their faces in prayer and intercession for the

people (like they always do when the people sin). But the Lord's anger began to burn against the people and a plague started. Aaron hurried to burn incense before the Lord to make atonement for the people. He did, but not until after 14,700 people were killed. Quite a lot of dead rebellers in three days time.

The verdict was in—Moses and Aaron were the leaders that God had chosen. The people of Israel had just witnessed the dramatic display of God's power by squashing the rebellion of Korah and his followers and the plague that went out among them due to their lack of belief in the Lord their God. Many people were dead, buried, or burned during the lesson of the three days. Now it was time to show the people who was their high priest and which tribe would serve the Lord as priests. Hopefully, this would end their constant grumbling before the Lord (we shall see).

The Lord told Moses to gather twelve staffs, one for the leader from each of the ancestral tribes with their name written on it. The staff of Levi had Aaron's name on it. They were to place the staffs in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Testimony (where the Lord met with Moses). *"The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites,"* said the Lord (Numbers 17:5). So the Israelites did so.

> *"The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the house of Levi, had only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the Lord's presence to all the Israelites. They looked at them, and each man took his own staff" (Numbers 17:8-9).*

Then the Lord told Moses to keep Aaron's staff in from of the Testimony *"as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die"* (Numbers 17:10). But the people said, *"We will die! We are lost, we are all lost! Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord will die. Are we all going to die?"* (Numbers 17:12-13). This completes a long couple of days of death and destruction among the rebellious Israelites.

It is interesting to note the repeated conflicts that the people of Israel had with Moses and Aaron as their leaders. They viewed them as the instigators and perpetrators of their situation in the wilderness. Because God was not a visible presence to complain to, the people did it to the tangible presence of Moses and Aaron. And yet, wasn't God visible in a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day? One would think that that would be evidence enough of a supernatural presence among them. But that is not how they acted.

Life Application

How do we treat those who are in authority over us? With disdain? Or with wise respect and submission? Especially our parents. Man that is hard!! But we are told that this will give us a long life on this earth—the first commandment with a promise.

Continued obedience even in the face of hardships. It is relatively easy to obey the Lord when the going is good; when situations lend themselves toward obedience. But what about when we really do not want to obey because of some selfish or perhaps even selfless thinking on our behalf. Even in spite of hurt and pain; we must choose obedience. The Lord never said that following him would be easy, but following him would be right and therefore bring life, not death and decay. We need to trust and follow what the Lord has for us through obedience, not our own thoughts on what obedience is.

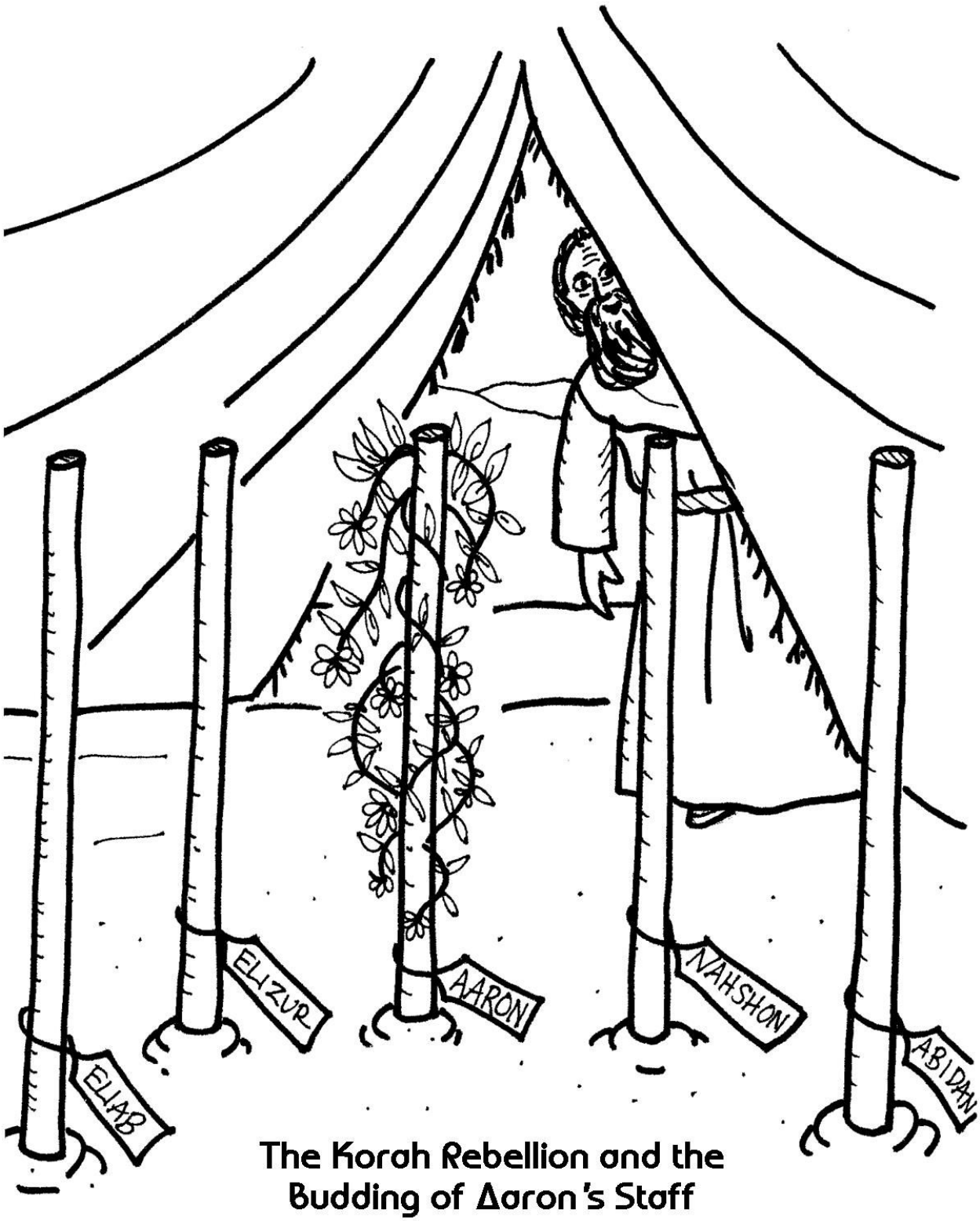
It is obvious from the stories that the Israelites went with their own gut feelings much of the time, their own warped sense of what was due them. Perhaps they had a sense of entitlement—God, if you want us to follow you, then come through for us on the things we want! It was true, God wanted what was best for his people. But not at the expense of their corrupted hearts. The special people of God, Israel, continued to obey themselves, not their God. Even early on they thought they had a corner on the God of the Universe. You know, like someone who has the ear of the President usually gets whatever he or she wants. Maybe that's how the Israelites viewed God—we can use Him to get what we want. And therein lies the problem—what they want, not God.

Review Questions

1. What book of the Bible is this lesson from? Numbers
2. Who rose up against Moses and Aaron? Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and 250 well-known Israelite men who were community leaders
3. Why did Korah and his followers oppose Moses? They did not think that Moses should be in charge. They thought Moses was trying to lord his authority over them.
4. What three punishments did God deliver to the rebels?
   One = the ground under Korah, Dathan and Abiram (and their families) split apart and the earth opened up and swallowed them
   Two = fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who followed Korah
   Three = 14,700 people died from a plaguesent from the LORD
5. Because there was a question of who was in charge, how did the LORD God settle that question? 12 staffs representing the twelve tribes of Israel were placed in the Tabernacle. *"The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling..."* (Numbers 17:5).
6. Whose staff sprouted? Aaron's staff: *"...had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds"* (Numbers 17:8).
7. Is the LORD God too harsh? Are His punishments (i.e. ground swallowing people, fire, and plagues that kill people) too much?

Coloring Sheet

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