

NUMBERS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Numbers chapter 16 as we continue our study through the Word of God. We have recently seen the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron against their brother Moses and how God dealt with that. We have seen the lack of faith the children of Israel had as God told them to go in and possess the land of Canaan, and they refused to go, and God also dealt with that.

Now, as we move into Numbers chapter 16 we once again see a rebellion against the leadership that God has established. Why didn't they learn the lesson? Because they refused to and what was boiling in their hearts was now going to overflow into their lives and God will once again deal with this. With that said, let's begin reading in Numbers chapter 16, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

NUMBERS 16

VERSES 1-3

1. Here we see Korah, a Levite but not a priest, not a descendant of Aaron, and Dathan, Abiram and On the sons of Reuben and they are leading the people in a revolt against Moses and Aaron. We don't read anymore of On, maybe because as this rebellion got started, he withdrew, we don't know for sure. But these men drew a following of 250 leaders, important people to follow them in their rebellion. And keep in mind that Korah is the main leader of this rebellion.

2. Now, why was Korah so upset, he was a Kohathite? Because he was not content, he was not satisfied in what God had called him to do! What menial task did the Kohathites have? They were to carry and be in charge of taking care of the holy things of God – the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread, the Seven-Branched Oil Burning Lamp and-so-on. They were responsible for carrying these when the camp moved and setting them up again. Yes, they were not priests but they had a God ordained role and now Korah was not satisfied and he got others to become dissatisfied! First of all Moses did not place himself in this position, God did. And the issue is jealousy, discontentment and it is not pretty!

VERSES 4-11

1. Notice the first thing that Moses does, he prays. Then, in his humility he does not fight for his position as these men were doing, but he leaves it up to God to sort this out. We don't know how long he prayed but he was confident of the outcome and how these men were not just coming against him, but they were coming against the Lord! And again, Moses points out that he is content with what God has given to him and it is this spirit that is now being manifested in his life. On the other hand, Korah is not, he wants to be a priest and God did not call him to that!

2. Interestingly enough, listen to what one of the sons of Korah wrote years later. In Psalm 84:10-12 we are told, **“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.”**

Notice, he is content in the Lord and thus, whatever he is given to do is great. Let me ask you this. Why do you want to go to Heaven? Some would say to escape Hell, or to be with family and friends; others say they want to escape the evil that is in this world, to see it done away with and-so-on. Those are all good answers but if you feel that way, you are wrong and you need to do a heart check. You see, the reason you should want to go to Heaven is because you want to be with Jesus and anything else is replacing your first love with something else. What if the only thing in Heaven was Jesus, would that be enough? You need to answer that for yourself!

VERSES 12-14

1. Dathan and Abiram, rejecting the authority of Moses, refuse to come to Moses but they were willing to complain. Was Egypt a land flowing with milk and honey? Not for them, they were slaves in Egypt for 400 years! Did Moses bring them into the wilderness to kill them? No, God brought them here to prepare them for the Promise Land and it was their lack of faith that brought the judgment of God upon them and this generation was to die in the wilderness and their children will enter into the land! These men did lack faith and that is why they would not enter in! But for those who are willing, they will enter in!

VERSES 15-19a

1. Yes Moses was angry but again, he was going to leave it in the hands of God to settle this matter! Moses could have arrested these men and put them to death, but again, God would deal with this and the nation would see that the hand of God was upon Moses and not these men. Moses did not get this position through a power struggle!

2. The challenge is this. These rebel leaders along with the 250 collaborators were to gather at the door of the tabernacle with their censers filled with incense and fire and against them were Moses and Aaron. Out of this God will show the nation who was to lead His people!

VERSES 19b-21

1. As they all gathered the glory of the Lord appears and the Lord speaks to Moses and Aaron and is basically telling them, “Boys, step aside from these men, get away from them because I am going to toast them!” That is an interesting situation. What if you found yourself in a position like this where an enemy, one who is causing you trouble, if God said that to you would you step aside? Let’s see what Moses and Aaron will do.

VERSES 22

1. They ***PRAYED!*** Now, they realized that God was going to deal with this rebellion but he did not want the entire nation wiped out for the sin of one man! Now, I thought there were over 250 men involved in this rebellion? Yes, but Korah was the leader and he inspired the others to follow along and thus, he was responsible!

VERSES 23-35

1. Who were these elders that followed Moses, coming alongside him and supported him? These are the seventy men that Moses appointed to assist him in the work, men who had the same spirit as Moses, the same vision, spirit-filled men! (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30). Folks, in any ministry leaders need those to come alongside and assist in the work, those who have the same spirit, the same vision, spirit-filled! And especially in difficult times, as we see here, men to stand with leaders, doing what God appointed them to do!

2. Moses is warning the people to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, not to stand with these divisive people. I believe that is an important lesson for each of us, God does not want us hanging around those who are divisive, contentious, argumentative. Why is that important to us? Because they will influence you and if you are not careful you will be consumed in their sins.

3. The New Testament gives us warnings regarding this issue. In Romans 16:17-18 Paul warns us, **“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”** And in Titus 3:10-11 Paul said, **“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”** You see, they are selfish, self-centered people who believe that their words and deeds are right but their fruit is rotten. Thus, avoid them so you are not caught up with them in their sin!

4. Here we see two judgments. If Korah, Dathan and Abiram's actions are not of God, then the earth will swallow them up and that is exactly what happened, including their families. Now that may not seem fair but God knows the hearts of the people and thus, His judgments are fair, they are right. Now this is interesting to me because in Numbers 26:9-11 we are told, **“The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the Lord; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.”**

How can this be? Because they did not go along with the rebellion of Korah and God did not punish them for the sins of their father. Not only that, according to I Chronicles 6:22-23 Samuel was a descendant of Korah. And, the sons of Korah wrote 11 of the Psalms and they served the Lord because they had a heart for God! That is our God and that is what He will do for those that love Him!

The other judgment was against the 250 leaders, followers of these men and they were consumed in the fire of God's judgment. Some commentators feel their punishment was less but folks, being consumed in the earth or by fire are still bad, it doesn't matter. It would be like saying, “He is the best person in Hell!” He may be but he is still in Hell! It is still not a good thing. You see, they brought their censers before God, a form of worship, and it was not accepted, it was judged. Why? Because their worship was not done in spirit and truth but out of their own heart, which was full of jealousy, anger, discontentment and God refused to accept it. What about you?

VERSES 36-40

1. Did you see that these men are associated with the rebellion of Korah! I doubt if they agreed with everything Korah was saying and doing but God puts them all together because their hearts and actions were wrong. Thus, these 250 bronze censers are hammered together.

2. These bronze censers were placed on the altar of sacrifice for a reminder to the children of Israel not to follow down that path of Korah, that you can't approach God anyway that you want. Yes, the censers were holy and thus, God used them but their fire was not, it was a strange fire and thus, it was scattered away from the tabernacle! God does not accept false worship or coming before Him the wrong way.

VERSE 41

1. Can you believe it, after all the children of Israel have seen you would think they would repent and get right with God instead of complaining like they are now doing. In fact, they are blaming Moses for killing these people when in reality God judged them and the reason He judged them was for their sin, it was their own doing that brought the judgment of God upon them. And think about it. Do you really think Moses opened the earth and had Korah, Dathan and Abiram swallowed up? Of course not! What about bringing fire down from Heaven to toast the 250 leaders? Of course not! But that is how they saw it. I am amazed at how some will side with divisive people; feel sorry for the divisive people as we see here.

VERSES 42-45

1. At this point, I would have just stepped out of the way, but not Moses and Aaron. They once again fell upon their faces in prayer before God, interceding for the people. That truly is the heart of God and the heart of a servant of God. Did they deserve to be judged? You bet, but Moses intercedes just as our Lord does for us. Paul tells us in Hebrews 7:25, **“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”** Yes, we may blow it and we will blow it but Jesus is there making intercession for us, “Father, this one is Mine. He has been cleansed by My blood, I have paid for his sins!” That is our God!

VERSES 46-50

1. The censer filled with burning incense is a picture of prayer and we see that in Revelation 8:3-4, **“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.”** Also, in Psalm 141:2 we are told, **“Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”** And we are told that in Numbers 16:47-48, **“ . . . So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.”** Aaron, as the high priest, runs in to intercede for the people and the plagued stopped. Folks, we, as God’s people are to stand between the living and the dead, praying for God’s mercy upon the people of this world! Is prayer important? You bet it is!

2. Tragically, in this judgment 14,700 people died and as God said, this generation will die in the wilderness because of their unbelief, but the next generation will enter into the land.

3. We too have a high priest who stands before God for us. We deserve His judgment, death, but He ran to save us and it is only through Him that we can enter into eternal life with Him and the Father.

4. One more point before we move on. Do you think Korah, the leaders who were following him, the others who complained about what Moses did, thought they were right? Of course they did! But they were wrong. You see, from a human perspective we can be very wrong as this story illustrates for us. We are told:

“Suppose tomorrow is election day. It’s time to elect a new world leader – and your vote counts. Here are the choices: Candidate A consults with astrologers. He’s had two mistresses, chain smokes and drinks eight to ten martinis a day. Candidate B was kicked out of office twice, sleeps until noon, used opium in college, and drinks a quart of brandy every evening. Candidate C is a decorated war hero, a vegetarian, is monogamous, doesn’t smoke, and drinks only an occasional beer. Candidate A was FDR. Candidate B was Winston Churchill. Candidate C was Adolf Hitler.” (Jon Courson).

Folks, we need to seek the discernment from the Lord or we can find ourselves in a very dangerous situation. We can side with those that are not walking with God even though outwardly they may seem very good; they make some very good points. John puts it like this in I John 2:20-21, “**But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.**” In other words, we have the Word of God opened up to us by the Spirit of God to give us the discernment we need as we face various situations in our lives to guide us!

NUMBERS 17

VERSES 1-3

1. Why did God do this? Because of the challenge that Korah had made and now God wants the children of Israel to know that He has placed Aaron as the high priest. To do this a rod from the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel was to be taken, with their name on each rod, including Aaron. The rod was a symbol of authority and, as I have said, God was establishing Aaron as the high priest; He wants them to understand this so they won't rebel again.

VERSES 4-7

1. A rod, which is nothing more than a dead piece of wood, would blossom and by this miraculous sign it will show that God has placed this man into the priestly leadership position and he did not do this himself. Does that mean they would never complain again? No, but they would have no excuse because God is showing them. And, the reality is, most of the time those who murmur won't be satisfied by something like this, but God will rid Himself of their complaints, there will be no excuse! Thus, as they gather the rods together they are placed in the tabernacle of witness so that all will know the heart of God in this matter.

VERSES 8-9

1. The next day we see Aaron's rod had sprouted, it blossomed, and it not only provided almonds but ripe almonds, while the other 11 rods remained barren, dead. Thus, all could see that God has picked Aaron, like He has said already and thus; there should be no more murmuring or complaining.

2. Please understand that God did not pick Aaron because he was perfect or even the most spiritual man. We have already seen that he wasn't. That was not what this contest was all about. God chose Aaron because He chose Aaron, end of story! Now the children of Israel needed to recognize what God had done in his life and respect that position that he has.

VERSES 10-11

1. Moses was to place this rod in the Ark of the Covenant as a witness or testimony that Aaron and his descendants were to be the priests in Israel. Now, according to Hebrews 9:4 we are told that the Ark of the Covenant had in it the Tablets of the Law, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. Think about that. As God dwelt between the cherubim and looked down into the Ark of the Covenant, He saw the Law that they broke. He saw the manna that they complained about. And He saw the rod of Aaron in response to the rebellion of the children of Israel. Why didn't God just wipe them out? Because of the blood applied to the mercy seat that was the cover for the Ark of the Covenant. Thus, God saw the atonement that was made and He had mercy upon them and that is truly what God has done for us, the blood cleanses us and we receive His mercy instead of His judgment!

VERSES 12-13

1. They did understand that they deserved to die because of their rebellion and they were fearful. For some, maybe they truly repented, for others, fear while life returns to normal but when trouble comes, they will murmur and complain again. May we come before God with thanksgiving and be filled with joy instead of murmuring and complaining! May we truly be in love with Him no matter what comes our way!

NUMBERS 18**VERSE 1**

1. Because of what just happened, God reminds the people the duties of the priests and He will remind them the duties of the Levities.

2. The Lord speaks to Aaron and his descendants, the priests, that with authority there is also accountability to not only the people but more importantly, to God!

VERSES 2-7

1. As we have seen in our studies, the descendants of Aaron were the priests, from the tribe of Levi. But not all Levites were priests, only the descendants of Aaron were. The rest of the Levites had other responsibilities in the care of the tabernacle.

2. We see this in the New Testament as there are many members in the body of Christ but they all don't do the same thing. We all have a role to do, a certain gift or calling that God has for our lives and as we serve we minister to the body of Christ, edifying them and bringing glory to God.

Paul, in I Corinthians chapter 12, put it like this, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. . . For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” I Corinthians 12:4-7, 12-31.

What is the best gift, the more excellent way? It is love, Agape love. Thus, no matter what position you have in the body of Christ, it must always be done in love, the love of Christ, that Agape love or unconditional love!

VERSES 8-20

1. With the various offerings the priest did, they were to get a portion of them. From the heave offering the choice part of the meat was given to the priest and his family. Also, of the grain, sin and trespass offering as well as gifts of oil, wine, grain, and fruit from the firstfruits, they were to be given to the priests.

2. This covenant that God made with Aaron and his sons, the priests, was an everlasting covenant. In verse 19 He calls it “**a covenant of salt forever.**” All these things belonged to the priest and it was the responsibility of the children of Israel to fulfill this obligation. Of this Spurgeon wrote, “By which was meant that it was an unchangeable, incorruptible covenant, which would endure as salt makes a thing to endure, so that it is not liable to putrefy or corrupt.”

3. When Joshua and the children of Israel enter into the Promise Land, the land of Canaan, the land will be divided amongst the 12 tribes of Israel, each will get a portion except for the tribe of Levi. They had no inheritance in the land; no portion was given to them because the Lord was their portion.

4. In Psalm 16:5-6 David wrote, **“O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance.”** You see, no matter what David had or didn’t have, the Lord was his portion and he needed nothing else. How about you? Asaph wrote in Psalm 73:25-26, **“Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”** Asaph also understood and believed that the most important thing in his life was the Lord. What about you? And again, David wrote while he was hiding out in a cave back in Psalm 142:5, **“I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, “You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living.”** David once again saw that the Lord is what he needed in his life and that was all. How about you?

Now, how does this relate to us as Christians? Peter tells us in I Peter 2:9-10, **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”** Peter is telling us God took us to be His people, we are His and thus, we need to be satisfied with our portion, He is our portion! You see, are you satisfied in the Lord? We should be because He alone will endure, we are His portion and He should be our portion forever!

VERSES 21-24

1. Yes, the tithe was given to the Lord and He, in a sense gave it to the Levites to help support them in the work they were doing. Thus, if you don't tithe you were not only robbing God of what was due Him but you were hindering the work of God by not giving to the Levites. In Malachi 3:8-10 we are told, **“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,’ Says the Lord of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.’”** God wants to bless and as you give to Him you are helping in the work of God, building the kingdom of God.

2. Paul presents this same principle in the New Testament for those who are ministering the Gospel of Jesus Christ as he tells us in I Corinthians 9:3-14, **“My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”**

VERSES 25-32

1. Even the Levites gave a tithe or ten percent of what they received to the Lord. Paul tells us of how we are to give in II Corinthians 9:6-7, **“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

God wants us to give from a cheerful heart, not grudgingly or out of pressure or compulsion. The idea here is to give hilariously to the Lord; it is something that is joyful. The big question for many is, “How much are we to give to the Lord?” Some will argue that it should be 10% as the children of Israel gave but the reality is, after it was all said and done, they gave over 20% to the Lord. And, there is no command in the New Testament how much we are to give but each person should purpose in his own heart what he should give.

Also, keep in mind that what Paul is saying here in II Corinthians, Solomon said in Proverbs 3:9-10, **“Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.”** As we give to the Lord we honor Him and we do assist in the work of the ministry, building the kingdom of God. The problem is that some will use this as some kind of cosmic investment program and that is wrong. That is not why you give to the Lord and as you give to Him, you may not get back monetarily, but He will bless you because He loves you and He will honor what you are doing. And isn't it a blessing to see the kingdom of God growing? Of course it is! Remember, it is all His and He gives to us so we may give back to Him and see the Gospel message go forward! Thus, give with a joyful heart to Him!