

TORAHSCOPE: Korach (Korah)

by Mark Huey posted 26 June, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Numbers 16:1-18:32
1 Samuel 11:14-12:22

“Budding Leadership Patterns”

“Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, **took action, and they rose up** before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’ When Moses heard *this*, **he fell on his face**” (Numbers 16:1-4)

One of the most dependable features of our Creator is that He is a God of order and consistency who can be relied upon to perform His Word without fail. Lamentably, most of fallen humanity disregards this fact. But even more tragic is the sad testimony that many who claim a relationship with Him are not always aware of His immutable nature. Thankfully, the Almighty is cognizant that humans have a fallen nature, and He has made provisions within His sovereign rule to guarantee that His Word is performed by the Heavenly Host of angelic beings:

“For He Himself knows our frame; **He is mindful that we are *but* dust**. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer. But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on **those who fear Him**, and His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant and remember His precepts to do them. **The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all**. Bless the LORD, **you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word!** Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will. Bless the LORD, all you works of His, in all places of His dominion; bless the LORD, O my soul!” (Psalm 103:14-22).

Did you notice that the Psalmist reminds us that the key to receiving God's blessings and lovingkindness is having a healthy fear of Him? A good part of that fear is trembling at the Word of the Lord, and understanding that once God has declared something, He is obligated to follow through because of His righteousness to complete it. Once a person is able to incorporate this reality into his or her heart, and respond in subservience to His will, the perplexities of life should hopefully become more manageable. By submitting and surrendering to what He has lovingly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, faithful Believers have the privilege of exercising their faith by taking action and completing the good works that they were created to perform. The Apostle Paul summarizes it very nicely:

“For we are His workmanship, **created in Messiah Yeshua for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

This week's Torah portion, *Korach*, details the tragic consequences of a group of Israelites who did not take the decree of the Lord seriously. The infamous Korah is the instigator of a rebellion against the chosen leadership of the fledgling nation of Israel, as they are painstakingly making their way from the bondage of Egypt to a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. By the time of this incident, many other examples of disobedience have already occurred. The cry for lack of meat is dealt with by God sending an abundance of quail, only to be accompanied by a severe plague that takes the lives of many doubters (Numbers 12:31-35). The incredible challenge of Miriam and Aaron to Moses' leadership is shown to be a visible reminder that even the closest relatives should not question the anointing of God's chosen (Numbers 12). Next, the ten unbelieving spies inject their doubting poison into the camp. The attempt to return to the favor of the Lord is unsuccessful as He uses the Amalekites and Canaanites to execute His judgment on the remorseful doubters (Numbers 14:41-45). Finally, the vivid example of one individual

gathering wood on the Sabbath is handled in a dramatic fashion, as the congregation of Israel is required to stone him in order to learn the lessons of defiant disobedience (Numbers 15:29-36).

These recorded events establish a backdrop for the ultimate challenge of Moses' anointed leadership by Korah and his associates, distant cousins of Levi and Reuben. Korah was not satisfied with the Divine privilege he had received to minister before God in the Tabernacle, and perhaps Dathan and Abiram were wondering why they too had not received recognition for being the descendants of the first born son of Jacob. Whatever their motivations were, the consequences of their actions against God's chosen are a reminder to us today that these fleshly-inspired, or perhaps even demonic rebellions, are not only going to happen—but should be expected by those who have been called into leadership positions in the Body of Messiah.

Since humans are simply animated dust, with even our thoughts being considered mere breath by our Creator (Psalm 39:4, 11; 94:11; 144:4), these patterns are regrettably repeated throughout history. Whether it is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life (1 John 2:16) motivating rebellion, the fact remains from Biblical and historical accounts that rebellion is in the heart of man. Having the knowledge of good and evil embedded in hearts of stone, the natural inclination is to become a god unto oneself. In so doing, men and women are susceptible to the wiles of the Devil, and as the Prophet Samuel stated several centuries later to King Saul, the insidious poison of divination germinates seeds of rebellion in the human heart:

“Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams. **For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.** Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being king*” (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Korah and his ilk are no different than many more who down through the ages have taken the Word of the Lord lightly—or worse—with disdain. Perhaps you can identify with the character analysis that is portrayed in this week's reading. But is it the character of Korah that is revealing—or the reaction of Moses to the challenge of his role—that inspires you? Consider the fact that we are given a great example of how leaders should react when Korahs, Miriams, or even unruly mobs attack one's God-ordained position and responsibility:

“**When Moses heard *this*, he fell on his face**” (Numbers 16:4).

Where else can a man or woman of God find solace and direction from an omnipotent Creator who has let insurrections grow? For those who can identify with Moses, on whatever level, his example should be taken to serious heart. Crying out to our Maker for His solution to the problems of life is our *only* choice when we are put in dire straights! When we do this, then in His mercy God should give us the guidance we need to handle whatever the challenge might be.

Interestingly, the solution was graphically executed as the Lord miraculously swallowed up Korah's family, burned with fire the other dissatisfied rebels, and additionally sent a plague into the camp killing many Israelites to deal with those who might have identified with the inclinations of the insurgents. Ultimately, the Lord decided to show the sign of the budding rod to the people that had rebelled, or at least questioned, the leadership of Moses and Aaron. This budding rod, a tangible reminder of His authority being placed upon these specific Levites, not only convinced the doubting masses, but eventually received the honor of being placed next to the Ark of the Covenant. This is detailed to us by the author of Hebrews:

“Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, **and Aaron's rod which budded**, and the tables of the covenant; and above it *were* the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail” (Hebrews 9:3-5).

This placement of the rod signified not only the leadership role of Aaron and his descendants, but also their proximity and closeness to the tangible relics of God's interaction with Israel as the chosen nation to be a light to the world (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). As Believers in Messiah

Yeshua, we have each been anointed by God and have been given a great calling to share Him with all we encounter. We not only have a great responsibility to learn His Word, but let the Word have its way in our lives.

A great example of someone who understood the call of serving God is Samuel, the last judge of Israel. He was chosen to anoint the first king of Israel, in spite of his disappointment about the people rejecting the Lord as their Sovereign King:

“But you have today rejected your God, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, ‘No, but set a king over us!’ Now therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans” (1 Samuel 10:19).

When it came time to submit to the permitted will of the people as directed by God, Samuel returned to the pattern that had been first established by Joshua when the twelve tribes first came into the Promised Land:

“Then Samuel said to the people, ‘Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.’ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they also offered sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly” (1 Samuel 11:14-15).

You should remember that it was at Gilgal that Joshua and the twelve tribes made a significant covenant with the Lord, as they faithfully circumcised the men of Israel, despite the immediate danger of enemy attack from the existing nations occupying the land of Canaan:

“Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. He said to the sons of Israel, ‘When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, “What are these stones?” then you shall inform your children, saying, “Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.” For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; **that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever.**” Now it came about when all the kings of the Amorites who *were* beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who *were* by the sea, heard how the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had crossed, **that their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel.** At that time the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Make for yourself flint knives and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time.’ So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, died in the wilderness along the way after they came out of Egypt. For all the people who came out were circumcised, but all the people who were born in the wilderness along the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised. For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, *that is*, the men of war who came out of Egypt, **perished because they did not listen to the voice of the LORD**, to whom the LORD had sworn that He would not let them see the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Joshua 4:9-5:6).

The Lord allowed the Israelites to enter into a faithful covenant as they painfully circumcised themselves upon entering the Promised Land. Samuel knew the significance of this sign, and that through the other reported signs, which included the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River on dry land, that the nations of the world would take notice. By returning to Gilgal to anoint and install King Saul, another significant sign was being made to not only the Israelites, but to all in the vicinity who rejected the Sovereign Creator God. By making the connection, Samuel exercised great wisdom as he knew that the patterns of the Lord were consistent and true:

“Then Samuel said to the people, ‘Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.’ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. **There they also offered sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly”** (1 Samuel 11:14-15).

Samuel exercised extremely good leadership as he was led to return to the patterns of his predecessors Joshua and Moses. Samuel was old and gray (1 Samuel 12:2), knowing that his days were numbered, and he like Moses was not a man who was beholden to any other man. In his final recorded soliloquy, Samuel exhorts the people to return once again to the Instruction of God, as he knew that only in obedience to God would they find the joy and peace that they desired. It was not in an Earthly king that mimicked the ways of the other nations that the Israelites would find peace and security. Because Samuel was charged with executing the will of the Lord, he relented and shared these profound words of encouragement:

“Then Samuel said to the people, ‘It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. So now, take your stand, that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did for you and your fathers. When Jacob went into Egypt and your fathers cried out to the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place. But they forgot the LORD their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. They cried out to the LORD and said, “We have sinned because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve You.” Then the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security. When you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, you said to me, “No, but a king shall reign over us,” although the LORD your God *was* your king. Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, **and behold, the LORD has set a king over you. If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God.** If you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, *as it was* against your fathers. Even now, take your stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD by asking for yourselves a king.’ **So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.** Then all the people said to Samuel, ‘Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins *this* evil by asking for ourselves a king.’ Samuel said to the people, **‘Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.** You must not turn aside, for *then you would go* after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile. For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. **Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.** But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away” (1 Samuel 12:6-25).

Can you sense the passion in Samuel’s pleas? As he recalls the relatively brief history of Israel and notes the continuing pattern of disobedience, he reminds the people of the requirement to fear the Lord. It is *only* through the reverent fear of God and His Word that we have an inkling of a chance of survival in any generation from Adam to the present. Of course, the Holy One has always shown signs to not only His people, but to the whole world, so that all will know that He is sovereign. Whether it is drying up seas or rivers, or sending rain at the appropriate times, He is in the habit of confirming with visible signs that are evident, and endorsing His chosen leaders with those readily identifiable markers.

But brothers and sisters be warned! The enemy of our souls is also in the business of mimicking various signs and wonders as an attempt to thwart the Divine will of God. We are warned incessantly about the false signs and wonders that have come, are coming, and will come

in the Last Days to test not only Believers, but lead many astray into judgment. Even Yeshua Himself warns us of those coming, that if possible, will lead the elect into falling away from the faith:

“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24, NRSV).

The Apostle Paul further elaborates on this in his communication with the Believers at Thessalonica:

“Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; *that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders*, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

Here is an amplification that should surely generate the fear of the Lord in anyone who truly believes that He says what He means. Notice that the reason that people are deceived is because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. This is critical because without the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit operating through a circumcised heart of flesh, those who have simply decided to lead a moral life are not able to discern the difference between a true sign from God and a deceiving sign from the Devil. The key is to be born from above, so that a healthy fear of the Lord is what motivates a person to seek Him with all of the heart, mind, soul and strength.

Perhaps the most sobering thing we see here is that the “strong delusion” (KJV, RSV) or “powerful delusion” (NIV) comes from God Himself. He will be the One who sends it upon the whole world. It will be the ultimate test as to whether someone truly believes upon the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, or not.

If you have a propensity to operate in the spirit of Korah, Miriam, the ten spies, or if you simply want to gather some sticks and do your own thing, you are in a very uncertain place in your walk with God. For a season, you might get away with your rebellion, because our Heavenly Father is longsuffering and full of compassion that no human has the capacity to demonstrate. But eventually, because His Word requires it, He is going to have to execute judgment. When this happens, where will you be standing? **I would note for you that you need not wait for the final judgment of mankind to wait for your personal judgment.**

I pray this week that you will be seeking God with all of your heart, falling on your face when desperate circumstances arise, and crying out to Him for understanding. I hope that you will learn to embrace the fear of the Lord with every ounce of your being. Our Heavenly Father is raising up Messianic leaders who have some important work to do in the days ahead. Will they follow the examples found in the Torah, and indeed all of Scripture? Will we have men and women who truly follow God and serve the community of faith? Will we have those who show mercy like the benevolent Creator we serve? Truly, my friends, we have much to consider from this week’s Torah portion.

Mark Huey (B.A., Vanderbilt University in History and Graduate Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) is the Director of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is the author of several books, including: *TorahScope, Volumes I & II*, and *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*. He is also co-author of *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*.

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