

TORAHSCOPE: Korach (Korah)

by Mark Huey posted 11 June, 2010 www.outreachisrael.net

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

“Falling on Faces”

When most people think of our Torah portion for this week, the title *Korach* naturally reminds them of the insurrection that Korah initiated when he challenged the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Unsatisfied with their delegated responsibilities, Korah and some two hundred and fifty leaders in the congregation asked Moses and Aaron why they “exalted,” or lifted themselves up, above the rest of the assembly. This accusation came without any known warning. The question in Moses’ mind was so astounding that his initial reaction was **to simply fall on his face before the Lord:**

“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).

This dramatic response to Korah’s indictment becomes quite serious, because God severely judges Korah and his followers.¹ The Lord uses the events to establish the position of Aaron and the Levites as servants and intermediaries of Israel before Him.²

While reading through our *parashah*, I took special notice of how the act of falling on one’s face and pleading for understanding or mercy—occurred an additional two times. The next time we witness this act of contrition and intercession is when God communicates the judgment that He is ready to deliver upon the congregation of Israel, for the people either following after Korah or considering his complaints:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.’ But they fell on their faces and said, ‘O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?’” (Numbers 16:20-22).

Just before, Korah and his cohorts, Dathan and Abiram, had leveled a series of serious charges against Moses (Numbers 16:12-14). Korah was a Levite³ and he was not satisfied with his position of service in the Tabernacle. He wanted have a similar position to Aaron’s, if not replace him. Dathan and Abiram, who were Reubenites,⁴ had a different motive. As descendants of the firstborn of Jacob, they must have thought that they deserved to be the leaders of Israel. They looked back at the recent failure to enter into the Promised Land, and blamed Moses for Israel’s defeat by the Amalekites and the Canaanites (Numbers 14:39-45). Even though Moses had warned the Israelites that they had missed their opportunity to occupy the Promised Land, the blame was directed to Moses from these ungrateful rebels (Numbers 15:41-45). As the accusations came forth, Moses was angered and he made a request to the Lord:

“Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, ‘Do not regard their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them’” (Numbers 16:15).

¹ Numbers 16:5-35.

² Leviticus 16:36-40; 17:1-18:32.

³ Numbers 16:1a.

⁴ Numbers 16:1b.

Moses knew about his special relationship with God. He could recall all of the encounters with the Holy One back to the burning bush experience. But as you should remember, Moses was somewhat of a reluctant leader. He questioned his ability to articulate the words of the Lord, and was subsequently told to bring his brother Aaron onto the leadership team in order to effectively communicate to Pharaoh and the Israelites (Exodus 4:14-15). Yet these accusations were too much to bear. Moses was grieved with his accusers, and so he offered a challenge to the two hundred and fifty insurrectionists to take up a fire pan with incense and bring it before the Holy One the (Numbers 16:6-7).

As the glory of God descended upon the Tent of Meeting, the Lord tells Moses and Aaron that He is going to pour out His wrath upon the congregation. It was at this word that the two men **fell on their faces** and pleaded for mercy for those gathered. At their request, the Lord gives them a way to separate out the rebellious from the somewhat innocent:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.’” Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him, and he spoke to the congregation, saying, ‘Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin’” (Numbers 16:23-26).

By falling on their faces and pleading for mercy, Moses and Aaron received a temporary solution to keep the innocent from being swallowed up in the dramatic judgment that was shortly to follow. The ground opened up and swallowed those who were allied with Korah. It was followed by fire coming forth and consuming the two hundred and fifty who had offered up the incense:

“As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. All Israel who *were* around them fled at their outcry, for they said, ‘The earth may swallow us up!’ Fire also came forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense” (Numbers 16:31-35).

Suffice it to say, Moses and Aaron were totally vindicated by these dramatic examples of God executing His judgment. But the exercise of falling on their faces was not complete. The very next day, the congregation of Israel decided to blame Moses and Aaron for the judgment meted out to Korah and his rebellious cohort:

“But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD’s people.’ It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared” (Numbers 16:41-42).

This was not a good thing for the Israelites to be doing. Moses and Aaron definitely had the Lord on their side of the struggle for leadership, and He again communicates to them that additional judgment would be coming. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces before Him to intercede. Knowing that a plague would be spreading through the camp, Moses instructed Aaron to quickly take his censer with fire from the altar with incense, and appeal to God for mercy:

“Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.’ Then they fell on their faces. Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense *on it*; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the LORD, the plague has begun!’” (Numbers 16:43-46).

The intercession worked, but not until after many Israelites had died because of the plague:

“He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked. But those who died by the plague were 14,700,⁵ besides those who died on account of Korah. Then Aaron returned to Moses at the doorway of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been checked” (Numbers 16:48-50).

Korah’s rebellion was checked, but not without a significant loss of life. Not only did Israel lose two hundred and fifty leaders from the tribes of Levi and Reuben, but apparently, the insurrection also affected many more. *These were serious consequences for the people of Israel.*

The Falling on Face Alternative

As I reflected upon these dramatic events, a number of thoughts came to mind. If you can place yourself back in time as a witness to these judgments, you should understand that there were very serious messages being communicated to Israel. Since this was taking place just a short while after the incidents concerning the twelve spies, and the subsequent aborted attempt to occupy Canaan without the protection of God (seen last week in *Shelakh-Lekha*), we see that there was a concerted attempt to challenge the leadership of Moses. When you contemplate watching the ground open up and swallowing Korah and his household and companions, this might conjure up images of a Hollywood production. Then, when you enhance this judgment with fire coming forth from the Most High to consume the two hundred and fifty who had been challenged to offer up incense—you can probably imagine special effects teams competing for an academy award.

Men and women of faith consider the scenes of *Korach* to be far more than just the fictional writings of some creative movie producer. *We believe that these were real life episodes in the history of Ancient Israel.* If you had been there as a witness, the images would never leave your memory. On top of seeing Korah and his associates swallowed up and burned alive, imagine the rapidity of a plague moving through the camp—the next day—with the loss of thousands of people! It is obvious that God was sending a very strong signal to Korah’s contemporaries—and to generations yet to come—that a rebellious spirit against His chosen servants is not something one should have.

As I thought about all this, I was quick to be reminded of the humble character of Moses and how he displayed it during this defiant attempt to usurp his authority. Three times during the course of these trials, Moses fell on his face before the Holy One for understanding and for intercessory pleadings for his fellow Israelites. **To me, this was a great example of how Believers should be react to crises that inevitably come our way.**

I then reflected upon the last time I went down on my face with intercessory, merciful prayers for my loved ones, friends, and acquaintances who are perishing. I was convicted that it had been far too long since the last time I had cried out for mercy for those who still, to this day, do not have a relationship with the Messiah Yeshua. In many respects, this is a chronic crisis because none of us knows when our loved ones’ days on Earth are going to end. This is even more reason to take the time to fall on the face and implore God for mercy!

I have to often ask myself when the last time it was when I fell on my face and pleaded with the Lord, for understanding and wisdom for situations beyond my ability to fully comprehend. *It is usually not that often when I assume a prostrated position.* And yet, Moses’ example—and many others throughout the Scriptures—are given to us as instructions to implement for our own walk with the Messiah.

How about you? When was the last time you humbled yourself and followed Moses’ example of falling on your face—either seeking God for mercy for your loved ones, or for wisdom on how to handle various challenges? Is it possible that the Father will honor our humble, prostrated requests for compassion for the lost, and give us answers to predicaments that perplex

⁵ Editor’s note: Due to the ambiguity of the Semitic term *elef*, even if we were to view 14 *elef* 700 as fourteen *squads* of seven hundred, this would still equal somewhere around 9,800 people—more than three times those killed in the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks.

us? In *Korach*, when Moses pleaded for mercy and wisdom, the Lord reacted favorably and gave him warnings about how to prevent any further loss of life. Perhaps there is something about falling on your face and admitting that you are totally dependent upon Him? Perhaps in His mercy, lost loved ones will be saved and solutions to life's challenges will usher forth? *It worked for Moses and Aaron*. Could it possibly have the same results for us?

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