

HIGHLIGHTS FROM NUMBERS
"Earth Shaking Judgment"
Numbers 16:1-35

BACKDROP

1. The word is out. Adults who murmured in the wilderness would not make it to Canaan (14:30). The children would get there (14:31).
2. More than that. God directed what the children should do when they get there (15:1-41). This was assurance that Canaan would be gained--no doubt.
3. Now comes a horrible interruption. The matter focused on Moses. In spite of repeated evidences of God's blessing on him, the people challenged and resisted his leadership. Apparently, their rebellious spirit was not broken--not by love nor by divine chastisement.

EPISODES OF REBELLION

1. The Leaders of Rebellion vv. 1, 2

- a. Korah v. 1

The Kohathites (Korah's family) were Levites. Their duties were associated with the service of the tabernacle, especially music (cf. Psa. 42-49, 84, 45, 87, 88).

- b. Reubenites v. 1

Three are mentioned: Dathan, Abiram, and On. The proximity of their tents on the south side of the tabernacle may explain their mutual involvement and common fate.

- c. Men of Renown v. 2

There were 250 of these men, "men of renown" means "men of name" (Gen. 6:4; 1 Chron. 5:24). Nobodies are "men without name" (cf. Job 30:8). It is certain these were not the rabble crowd (cf. 11:4).

2. KORAH REBELLION vv. 3-11

- a. Complaint v. 3

The roles of Moses and Aaron in the congregation are called in question. They are accused of having "too much for you" and "lifting up themselves." This is interpreted as "seeking the Priesthood," "gathering against the Lord," and "murmuring against Aaron" (vv. 10, 11). Support for this complaint is that "all the congregation is holy."

This complaint is very familiar to modern-day Pastors and Christian workers. The answer is simple: no believer is holier than another, but there are God-given rolls within a local congregation and the

wider Church. Accept both truths and peace and harmony will reign.

b. Dialogue vv. 4-11

This is very lively. Basically Moses makes three comments: 1) He proposes Korah do a priestly task to see God's response (vv. 6, 7). 2) He points to their own service (vv. 9, 10). 3) He believes they, not Moses/Aaron, have gone too far (v. 7c).

N.B. Korah was next in rank to the priests. To play 2nd fiddle is often more difficult than 1st fiddle!

3. DATHAN/ABIRAM/ON REBELLION vv. 12-15

a. Complain vv. 13, 14

The complaints are multiple: 1) They had been taken from Egypt, a land of milk and honey. Wow! 2) Moses wanted to feather his own bed (v. 13). 3) They had not been brought into Canaan (v. 14). 4) Moses wanted to gouge out their eyes (or figuratively to blind them by false promises) (v. 14).

b. Response vv. 12, 15

Moses summoned these men to where Korah was being confronted, but they refused his order (v. 12). This caused Moses 1) To become angry. 2) To ask God to disrespect their offerings. 3) To see that he (Moses) had not abused his role and power (cf. 1 Sam. 12:3).

4. PUNISHMENT OF REBELLION vv. 16-35

a. Assembly for Punishment vv. 16-19

Korah and his entourage were summoned to appear with their censers. Apparently Dathan, Abiram, On, and the 250 men of renown were also present. It may be they expected to be publicly vindicated. Behold, God's glory appeared (v. 19).

b. Announcement of Punishment vv. 20-27

God indicates immediate judgment (v. 21). Moses and Aaron interceded for the nation (v. 22). Separation from the sinning culprits was commanded (vv. 23-27).

c. Demonstration of Punishment vv. 28-35

Moses calls upon God to vindicate his cause by performing a novel and spectacular judgment (vv. 28-30). Exactly as Moses predicted, point by point, God brought punishment.

FALLOUT What can be learned from this rebellious outburst? Consider:

1. The rebellion was a provocation of God. This means they held Him in derision (vv. 11, 30). 2. The rebellion was against God given roles for Moses/Aaron. God does call some to one service and not others. 3. The rebellion did not abrogate God's promise (14:31; 26:10, 11); 1 Chron. 6:33ff). 4. God's glory is not always associated with blessing (v. 19). N.B. Principles in the O.T. are not to be ignored by N.T. believers. Amen.