

KORAH'S REBELLION

The Old Testament Today

Banska Bystrica, 23rd April 2023

Nu 16:1 - 17:13 Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. ² And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. ³ They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" ⁴ When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, ⁵ and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. ⁶ Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; ⁷ put fire in them and put incense on them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!" ⁸ And Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹ is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, ¹⁰ and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? ¹¹ Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?" ¹² And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and they said, "We will not come up. ¹³ Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us?" ¹⁴ Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up." ¹⁵ And Moses was very angry and said to the LORD, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed one of them." ¹⁶ And Moses said to Korah, "Be present, you and all your company, before the LORD, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow. ¹⁷ And let every one of you take his censer and put incense on it, and every one of you bring before the LORD his censer, 250 censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer." ¹⁸ So every man took his censer and put fire in them and laid incense on them and stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹ Then Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation. ²⁰ And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ²¹ "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." ²² And they fell on their faces and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?" ²³ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ "Say to the congregation, Get away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." ²⁵ Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶ And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins." ²⁷ So they got away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. ²⁸ And Moses said, "Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. ²⁹ If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD." ³¹ And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. ³² And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up!" ³⁵ And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men offering the incense. ³⁶ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁷ "Tell Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest to take up the censers out of the blaze. Then scatter the fire far and wide, for they have become holy." ³⁸ As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they offered them before the LORD, and they became holy. Thus they shall be a sign to the people of Israel." ³⁹ So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned had offered, and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar, ⁴⁰ to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the LORD, lest he become like Korah and his company- as the LORD said to him through Moses. ⁴¹ But on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD." ⁴² And when the congregation had assembled against Moses and against Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting. And behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. ⁴³ And Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, ⁴⁴ and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁴⁵ "Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. ⁴⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the LORD; the plague has begun." ⁴⁷ So Aaron took it as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. ⁴⁸ And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped. ⁴⁹ Now those who died in the plague were 14,700, besides those who died in the affair of Korah. ⁵⁰ And Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, when the plague was stopped. ^{ESV} **Nu 17:1** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the people of Israel, and get from them staffs, one for each fathers' house, from all their chiefs according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. Write each man's name on his staff, ³ and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each fathers' house. ⁴ Then you shall deposit them in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you. ⁵ And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus I will make

to cease from me the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against you." ⁶ Moses spoke to the people of Israel. And all their chiefs gave him staffs, one for each chief, according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. And the staff of Aaron was among their staffs. ⁷ And Moses deposited the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the testimony. ⁸ On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. ⁹ Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the LORD to all the people of Israel. And they looked, and each man took his staff. ¹⁰ And the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumbings against me, lest they die." ¹¹ Thus did Moses; as the LORD commanded him, so he did. ¹² And the people of Israel said to Moses, "Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. ¹³ Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, shall die. Are we all to perish?"

Ταῦτα δὲ τύποι ἡμῶν ἐγενήθησαν, εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἐπιθυμητὰς κακῶν, καθὼς κακέينوι ἐπεθύμησαν.

1Co 10:6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

תַּחַת שְׁלוֹשׁ רְגָזָה אֶרֶץ וְתַחַת אַרְבַּע לֹא-תוֹכַל שְׂאֵת
תַּחַת-עֶבֶד כִּי יִמְלוֹךְ וְנָכַל כִּי יִשְׁבַּע-לֶחֶם
תַּחַת שְׁנוּאָה כִּי תִבְעַל וְשִׁפְחָה כִּי-תִירַשׁ גְּבוֹרָתָהּ

Pr 30:21-23 Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: ²² a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food; ²³ an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress

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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. A VERY MODERN PROBLEM

- egalitarianism
 - [SCHLOSSBERG] Equality of opportunity and equality before the law...
 - [SCHLOSSBERG] The leveling movement has nothing to do with justice, because its impulse is not to raise those who are down but to topple those who are up; resentment is the motive.
 - [JENCKS] ...most Americans define poverty in relative rather than absolute terms.
- → "democracy" (danger of lawlessness; fragmentation;)

0.2. WHERE IS SHEOL?

- It is a *spiritual* space... - we should not identify it with the centre of the Earth

0.3. THE "THEOLOGY" OF THE REBELS

- v. 3 For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them...
 - theoretical(?) ANARCHISM (Rom 13)
 - → **1Pt 2:17** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (πάντας τιμήσατε, τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀγαπάτε, τὸν θεὸν φοβείσθε, τὸν βασιλέα τιμᾶτε)
- against Moses → the LAWGIVER; against Aaron → the PRIEST

0.4. MOTIVES FOR REBELLION

- Those who have a lot want MORE... → **ressentiment** (SCHELER) (positive into negative; comparing)
- ENVY → **Mt 27:17-18** So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.
- **Jude 1:8** Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. (Ὁμοίως μέντοι καὶ οὗτοι ἐνυπνιαζόμενοι σάρκα μὲν μαιίνουσιν κυριότητα δὲ ἀθετοῦσιν δόξας δὲ βλασφημοῦσιν.)

1. GOVERNING THE PEOPLE OF GOD

- "*Hominum confusione et Dei Providentia mundus regitur,*" schrieb Barth bezeichnenderweise nach Kriegsausbruch 1914 an Martin Rade
- the workings of theocracy

1.1. WISDOM

- plurality leadership → openness to criticism (not quoting: **Ps 105:15** Touch not my anointed ones...)
 - **Pr 11:14** Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety
 - **Pr 15:22** Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.
 - **Pr 24:5-6** A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might, ⁶ for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.
- Moses → let them decide every minor dispute themselves" (Exodus 18:17-22)
- **Ezra 10:14** ...the elders and judges of every city...
- Church elders → 1Pt 5

1.2. THE SCRIPTURE

- **1Cor 4:6** I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

1.3. THE HOLY SPIRIT

- "judges" → charismatic leaders
- **Eph 4:11-12** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

2. AUTHORITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

- → 1Cor 12-14!

2.1. MUTUAL SUBMISSION

- **Phil 2:3** Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves (ἡγοούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν).

- **Heb 13:17** Obey your leaders (Πείθεσθε τοῖς ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν) and submit (ὑπέικετε) to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

2.2. SERVANTHOOD

- **Mk 10:42-44** And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."

2.3. CRITICISING THE AUTHORITIES

- the prophetic role of the Church in society
- not from personal resentment ()
- not against institution (Rom 13)

3. LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

3.1. UNDER THE HIGHER AUTHORITY

- rely on proofs from God Himself → Psalms asking God for judgment
- CHARLES SIBTHORPE *A Man Under Authority* (Kingsway, 1984)
 - The Quality of a Leader's Life
 - A Man with a Heart after God; - A Man Who Stands before God - A Man under God's authority - Lives in Revival - Lives at the Cross - Hears God - Lives His Message - Lives to Seek God –
 - The Principles of a Leader's Work
 - A Man of the Gospel – of the Spirit – of the Word - of Prayer – of Faith – of Humility – of Compassion – of Courage - Sets Others Free to Serve

3.2. FORGIVING

- interests of the people before the self-interest
- Moses and Aaron used their *God-given powers* to SAVE the people who rebelled against them...

3.3. SELF-EFFACING

- no "celebrity complex" → refusing undue honour
- **2Sa 23:14-17** David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. ¹⁵ And David said longingly, "Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" ¹⁶ Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the LORD ¹⁷ and said, "Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.

4. TO REMEMBER

- Equality before God: **Rom 3:23-24** ...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
 - Gal 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. → Philippians 2:3.
- God rules the world through human hierarchies. **Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.
 - Church has *functional* hierarchy for *service* (Eph 4:11)

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- Through human hierarchies we are submitting to God. → Rom 13; **Acts 5:29** But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must **obey God rather than men.**"