

Parashah One Hundred and Twelve

Numbers 16:1–50 [Hebrew 16:1–17:15]; 1Sam 11:1–15; Jude 1

notes by Tim Hegg

The Rebellion of Korach

In this awesome *parashah* we are once again given a revelation of God—Who He is, and His perspective on what is righteous and what is not. As always, the Torah challenges our own manufactured picture of God, for it is natural for mankind to manufacture his own view of God, creating Him in his own image. As we study and submit to the Torah, we are therefore afforded the happy opportunity to see God as He truly is—as He has revealed Himself. When we do, we are regularly confronted with the fact that God’s holiness is far greater than we normally think. In our modern view of things we fear that to understand the truth about God’s utter holiness will cast Him as an unapproachable sovereign Who has no heart of love or compassion for our weaknesses and foibles. But to put our theological heads in the sand and pretend that HaShem is one way when in reality He is another, is surely to act the part of a fool. For the three-times-holy God must be known and accepted as He is—as He has revealed Himself. And when we are willing to allow the truth of His holiness to penetrate our hearts we come to understand afresh how precious is the atonement He has made for us in the death of the Messiah. Furthermore, we come to abhor our sin all the more, and thus a correct view of God is the foundation for our sanctification. Never think that a biblical emphasis upon the holiness of God will somehow cloud one’s “religion” or make worship into some kind of stilted exercise before a Sovereign that is feared in a morbid way. No! Rather, to understand and accept God’s revelation of His absolute holiness is to find a Father Who will never fail to keep His promises, a Father Who will go to the full extent of His divine omnipotence to accomplish His will, Who therefore will never allow one of His loved ones to perish. Here is the basis for all that is loving and gentle about HaShem—it is His unflinching holiness—His eternal unswerving character that forms the basis of a sure faith. In short, we may place our faith in HaShem without reservation for this reason, primarily, because He is holy.

The situation described in our *parashah* on this Shabbat is not difficult to understand—it describes a heart condition in Korach and those who followed him which each of us know first-hand, for each of us, to one extent or another have, at some point in our lives, participated in rebellion against the Almighty. What is often foreign to us, however, and what this *parashah* brings to us in stark relief, is HaShem’s point of view when rebellion rears its ugly head. Here, once again, is something we generally know and understand but all too often willingly forget. We want to believe that God does not like rebellion, but understands when we slip into it. We want to believe that while God speaks a parental “no-no,” He really understands that rebellion is something that we do because we’re human and we’re still learning—growing. What we do not want to believe is that God views rebellion as an abomination—that He looks at rebellion as the highest form of idolatry. And why do I say the “highest” form of idolatry? Surely the slaughter of children in the so-called worship of Molech must outweigh an inner spirit of rebellion! But here is the insidious nature of rebellion: if left unchecked it becomes the fertile soil out of which every sort of idolatry grows. Rebellion against God’s authority is the seed-bed of idolatry, and it was so from the very beginning.

We should therefore, once again, be grateful to HaShem that He gives to us this *parashah* and this horrid picture of death that comes to those who rebel against God’s authority. It is God’s mercy that we are warned, and thus protected, from that which could otherwise be our own demise.

If we look more closely at the *parashah*, we may derive enduring principles for our own use and sanctification.

(1) When we find ourselves discontented with the place in life in which God has placed us, we are vulnerable to the sin of rebellion.

Where does this start with us? Perhaps it starts by failing to believe that God has, in fact, ordained our way and prepared our path. Or that somehow what we're doing and the place in which He has put us does not match our potential—that somehow our current station in life is somewhat beneath us. Whatever the case, the first seed of heart rebellion is an ungrateful spirit, a refusal to thank HaShem for the station in life to which He has assigned us. Conversely, one of the primary antidotes against rebellion is the practice of acknowledging that God's providence is active in our lives (i.e., to put full trust in Him) and then to give thanks to Him for having put us in the place of His appointment. For we may trust that if He has assigned us our current life-task, then surely He will both provide the means for us to accomplish His will, and bless us as we obey and do His bidding. It is in this spirit of "giving thanks" that we develop spiritual immunity against the disease of rebellion. "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Messiah Yeshua" (1Thess. 5:18).

(2) Rebellion often begins, not as an overt "thumb in the eye" of God, but as a refusal to accept the authority of leaders whom God has appointed.

Korach, and those who help lead his rebellion against Moses and Aaron, could not accept the fact that their wandering in the wilderness was God's punishment for their failure to obey Him and enter the Land. The responsibility for their punishment was, therefore, transferred to Moses and Aaron, who were judged as being poor leaders. Rather than accept the fact that their disobedience to God's command to enter the Land had resulted in the current situation, they tried to transfer the guilt to someone else. Blame-shifting is surely a tell-tale sign of a rebellious heart. Repentance comes when we are willing to admit, first to ourselves, and then to God, that the sickness of soul we are experiencing is the result of our own sin, not that of others. Blame-shifting is the rebel's way—personal confession of sin is God's way.

(3) Rebellion skews one's view of everything

Korach and his rebel band began to blame Moses and Aaron for the punishment of death in the wilderness, though it was HaShem Who pronounced the punishment! But in the midst of their rebellion they could no longer see things as they really were. The anger had clouded their vision. Notice how they refer to Egypt: "a land flowing with milk and honey," the very description that HaShem used to describe the Promised Land! Rebellion turns everything on its head. Had they forgotten the terrible life in Egypt? Had they forgotten the harsh treatment, the beatings, the death of those who could not maintain the impossible demands of the taskmasters, the total disruption of family and community, the inability to worship HaShem as He had prescribed? "Forgotten" is the wrong word—"blinded" would be better. A cataract of rebellion had settled over their spiritual eyes.

(4) Worship (especially prayer) is a litmus test for rebellion

Note that Moses' test for the rebels is that they take their fire-pans and incense and approach HaShem to see if He will accept their offerings. They were the ones who performed the daily incense offerings in the Tabernacle. Incense is a sign of prayer (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3) and the test which Moses gives speaks symbolically of the acceptance of prayer before HaShem. Often rebellion is not as blatant as it was in this story. Sometimes rebellion festers in the heart and comes

upon us by small advances. How might we know if the infection of rebellion has found root in our souls? Ask this: how are my prayers before HaShem? Do I come away from times of prayer (both corporate and private) with an honest sense that I have communed with the Almighty, or are my prayers simply a performance—a going through the motions? In times of prayer, do I find the Spirit revealing my own heart, and my own need for Him, or are my prayers primarily given in hopes that God will open the eyes of others? Note well what the text says: (16:5) “... even the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself.”

(5) Rebellion is infectious

Once God has made it clear to Moses what He intends to do to those who had rebelled, Moses wisely warns the rest of the people to stay away from them. But it would have been just as good advice had Moses told them to stay away from them when the rebellion broke out, for *rebellion is infectious*. Even as we all are susceptible to certain diseases because we are human, so we all have the ability to be infected by rebellion—indeed, the “virus” lays dormant in all of us. Here is why we must never allow a root of bitterness (Hebrews 12:15, cf. Deut 29:18) to exist among us, for it is the means of spreading the disease of rebellion. When the Scriptures teach that “bad company corrupts good morals” (1Cor 15:33), it surely applies to those who would spread a spirit of rebellion.

(6) God hates rebellion because it is idolatry

The outbreak of God’s fury against Korach and his followers is paralleled only by the further outbreak against the congregation of Israel as they blame Moses and Aaron for the death of the rebels. HaShem’s utter hatred of this sin is graphically given to us in this *parashah*, for death flows in the camp. Not only Korach and all those near him, but 14,700 more people died as a result of his rebellion. The blood on his head extended much further than he could have ever imagined, for he led the people in rebellion.

(7) Our High Priest intercedes on our behalf to stop the plague of rebellion

The picture of Aaron, with incense, standing between the living and dead, is the picture of Yeshua, interceding on our behalf. If it were not for His always living to make intercession for us (cf. Heb 7:25), we too would be consumed by the holy justice of God’s wrath, for we, with Adam, have participated in rebellion against the Most High. It is most interesting that atonement is effected for the people through the offering of incense. Moreover, the incense is taken into the midst of the people, and is not confined to the altar of incense in the Holy Place of the Mishkan. The picture is clearly that of intercession for the people, and may well be symbolic of the incense offered on Yom Kippur, that filled the Most Holy Place as the High Priest performed his duties. Since the plague that consumed the people was the direct result of God’s abiding presence in the cloud (16:45 [17:10]), the incense is taken to the midst of the people, even as the incense on Yom Kippur is taken into the place of the *shekinah*, the cloud of God’s presence. Moreover, since incense is symbolic of prayer or intercession, it is fitting that Aaron should offer incense as a foreshadow of Yeshua’s own intercessory work on behalf of His own. Yeshua also stands between the living and dead, and protects by His own righteous offering those for whom He died.