

THE INTERCONTINENTAL CHURCH OF GOD

SPECIFIC BIBLE STUDIES - WHAT IS THE "SPIRIT OF KORAH?"

SUBJECT: "spirit of Korah"

QUESTIONS: What is the "spirit of Korah"? Just what did Korah do and what lessons are there for us today?

ANSWER:

The "spirit of Korah" refers to a negative attitude he held regarding the leadership of the children of Israel. He sought, with others, to overthrow Moses and Aaron. Korah felt he was more qualified than Moses and that he should be leading Israel. To tell you the story, following is an excerpt from "The Bible Story" published years ago by our parent church:

Picking up the story in Chapter 41, REBELS CHALLENGE GOD'S GOVERNMENT"

Discontentment Grows Again

Not long after the Israelites left Kadesh, another wretched event took place that resulted in another great disaster. The situation developed because a state of envy existed in the minds of some of the people who wanted to be priests or who wanted certain of their friends to be priests and leaders instead of Levi's family.

Foremost among such men was a man named Korah, one of Levi's great grandsons and a first cousin to Moses and Aaron. He strongly felt that he should have been chosen for a high office. In fact, he had the idea that he should be in Moses' position as head of Israel. He was joined in this ill attitude by three Reubenites, Dathan, Abiram and On. They were of the opinion that Moses was favoring his family too much, and was not properly distributing the offices of authority. These men thought all the congregation should have a voice in government. (Numbers 16:1-3.)

For a long time these men had been seething with discontent and planning how they could move in to take over the priesthood for themselves. This scheme against Moses was the same as scheming against God (Numbers 26:9), but these men were desperate for power. Gradually they managed to persuade high-ranking Israelites that their cause was right. Eventually two hundred and fifty Israelite leaders agreed to join these influential, smooth-talking schemers in the hope that all would move into higher rank with greater power and more income.

One morning when Israel was camping at a stopping place on the way southward, all these ambitious men gathered before Moses' tent. With Korah, their best speaker and worst schemer leading them, they came to demand of Moses that some changes be made in the priesthood. When Moses was told that a crowd of high ranking men had come to demand some changes in government, he wasn't surprised. He had sensed for weeks that this kind of trouble was brewing. Now, as he came out of his tent, he expected to see only a handful of men. He was rather startled to see more than two hundred and fifty, and he was considerably upset to recognize so many trusted men of high rank among those who now stood before him with unfriendly expressions. (Numbers 16:2.)

"Why are you here?" Moses asked.

Korah Wants More Authority

"We are here because we believe you are taking on too much power for one man," Korah answered. "You and your priests act as though you are holier than any of the rest of us. If we are God's chosen people, then ALL of us are holy. That means that all of us have equal rights in matters of government. However, you use your authority to put men who are your friends in the best positions in government. (Verse 3.) We demand that you yield some of those offices to the congregation so we can choose our own officials." Korah, being a good speaker, knew he could be elected to a high office if the people were allowed to choose their own leaders. What Korah really was after was complete control of all Israel. Leaders of nations have always been the objects of envy by greedy men. Seizing leadership has always been a selfish, bloody game, with the greatest losers generally turning out to be the citizens. Even Israel, God's chosen nation, wasn't free of this kind of ambitious trouble makers.

Moses was shocked by this blunt demand from Korah. He could see that the men weren't just bluffing. It was plain that they were willing to go to extremes to gain what they had set out to do. Setting armed soldiers on them would

only mean bloodshed. Besides, most of the Israelites would sympathize with the victims of the soldiers, since they were popular, well-known leaders, and the situation would become worse.

Without even going back into the privacy of his tent, Moses knelt forward with his head to the ground and asked God for help. A few of those assembled became uncomfortable as they stood in the presence of a humble man calling on his Creator for aid. They included On, one of the Reubenites. He wanted no more of the matter, and slipped out of the scene. Other onlookers merely smiled at what they considered an attempt by Moses to gain their sympathy by appearing pitifully pious.

"This is no time for a show, Moses!" Korah called out. "Stand up and explain why at least some of us shouldn't be priests in place of some of those who are now in service merely because it was your whim to put them there." Korah, a Levite, already had a high office, but he wanted an even higher office -- the priesthood that was given to Aaron. (Verses 8-11.)

Moses slowly came to his feet. Those who watched him couldn't know that God had just inspired him to know what to say. Ignoring Korah, Moses addressed Dathan and Abiram.

Moses Tries to Save Rebels

"Before you carry this matter further, let us discuss it in my tent," Moses said, thus giving them an opportunity to separate from Korah.

"There is no reason to talk with you," Dathan and Abiram replied. "We refuse to listen to your excuses for leading us from the good land of Egypt and into a desert where we are to die. Your only aim has plainly been to control the people, no matter what becomes of them." (Verses 12-14.)

These untruthful charges upset Moses. He was tempted to summon soldiers to slay every rebel before him. But he knew this was not according to God's plan of dealing with them, and he controlled himself.

"You have started something you will have trouble finishing," Moses declared to Korah in a voice that reached the whole crowd. "Your belief that just anyone can be in the priesthood without being ordained by God is not a true one. However, if all of you insist on trying to force your way into such offices, every one of you should be here tomorrow morning with incense and with a censer filled with hot coals. Aaron and his sons will also be here with their censers. God will make it known which ones he will choose as priests and their helpers." (Verses 4-7.)

Korah smiled when he heard this. He lacked respect for God, and he felt that he had bluffed Moses into giving in to the extent that he and his followers could gain a foothold in wresting power from Moses.

Rebels Challenge Moses

Next morning the crowd of two hundred and fifty, plus Korah, Dathan and Abiram, appeared before the tabernacle. Every man carried a censer filled with hot coals to show his readiness to go at once into priestly service. Korah had spread the word throughout the camps that he was going to challenge Moses, and that there would be a showdown to free the people from what was wrongfully referred to as Moses' unfair leadership. As a result, a growing crowd of curious people built up behind Korah's men.

Moses came out to face Korah. With him were Aaron and Aaron's sons, all of whom held censers with hot coals. The elders of Israel were also present.

There were minutes of strained silence. God hadn't told Moses what to do beyond asking the men to show up with censers. Moses didn't know what would happen next, but he was certain that God would somehow make it very clear which group would be in power from then on.

Suddenly there was a brilliant flash from the tabernacle, followed by a second and a third. It was plain to most that God was in the tabernacle. (Verse 19.) Some of them drew back, fearful of what might happen. Even a part of Korah's followers appeared to be ready to leave, but Korah told them to stand firm. Korah had become so rebellious that he actually doubted that God could hinder him and his men from gaining leadership of Israel, and the blinding display of light from within the tabernacle didn't move him from his ambition.

Realizing that God wanted to give them some message, Moses and Aaron stepped away from the others and approached the tabernacle.

"Remove yourselves and the priests and elders from these people who face you," God commanded in a voice that only the two men could hear. "I want you at a safe distance because I intend to wipe all the others out of existence!" (Verses 20-21.)

Moses shuddered at this alarming remark from God. The Creator had threatened to do the same thing before, but Moses had begged him not to, and God answered Moses' prayer. There was nothing to do now but again ask God to spare the people. Moses and Aaron bowed down in fervent prayer.

"Look at him!" Korah exclaimed to those about him. "He's trying again to gain the sympathy of the people by appearing pious!"

On the contrary, Moses wasn't concerned at that moment what the people thought. He was concerned for their lives, and he pleaded with God not to be angry with many people because of the evil deeds of a few. (Verse 22.)

God Spares the People

"I shall do this much," God said. "I shall spare the congregation if you can succeed in getting the people back to their homes and away from the tents where Korah, Dathan and Abiram live. Any who go near the homes of those three men will risk losing their lives."

Encouraged by this merciful statement from God, Moses sent his officers out to warn the crowd to break up and return to their tents, and not to go near the tents of Korah, Abiram and Dathan. Slowly and a bit unwillingly the people sauntered away.

"You said that God would choose His priests if we would assemble with censers," Korah called out to Moses. "You have only proved to the people that you are not a man of your word, because nothing has happened. Tomorrow we shall return. The people will think the matter over, and tomorrow they will be ready to back us up in what should be done about your authority."

"You should remember this in the meantime," Moses replied. "If you live till tomorrow, then you can know that I will not continue to be the leader of the Israelites."

This strange remark was ignored by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who returned to their respective homes, which were close together on the south side of the Tabernacle. (Numbers 2:10 and 3:29.) Korah felt that he had made another successful step, and that it would be only a matter of a day or two before the mass of Israelites would swing over to his side. As for his two hundred and fifty followers, they also left and went back to their various camps.

Later, Moses and Aaron and the elders went to make certain that the people were not congregated around the homes of the three main offenders. They found their residence free of visitors, which was as God wanted it to be. Moses then warned them that because they persisted in a scheme to take over the government, God would cause the ground to open up and swallow them. (Verses 23-30.)

Dathan and Abiram came out of their tents, along with their wives and children, to hear what more Moses had to say.

"Now he's trying to threaten us with an earthquake," Dathan scornfully shouted to Abiram. "Can you think of anything more fantastic?"

"I'll believe it only when it happens -- and maybe not even then," Abiram shouted back with a grin.

Too Late to Repent!

"We have given these men fair warning," Moses said to those with him. "Perhaps God would spare them if they would repent, but since they refuse to repent, it's obviously too late now. Let us leave here before something dreadful happens."

Almost as soon as their backs were turned there was a growing rumble from within the Earth. The ground trembled, then heaved upward directly between the tents of Abiram and Dathan and the tent of Korah, which was close by in another camp!

Chapter 42 "THE EARTH OPENED ITS MOUTH!"

SCREAMING terrorized people of all three families -- Korah, Dathan and Abiram -- rushed wildly and aimlessly in all directions. Then the quivering mound of ground suddenly collapsed and fell back into a deep, yawning chasm! Tons of soil and rock slipped off the vertical sides of this horrifying hole and thundered down into dark oblivion, taking people, tents, animals and most everything that belonged to Korah, Dathan and Abiram. (Numbers 16:31-33 and 26:10.) It was as though a gigantic mouth had opened in the Earth's crust for the one purpose of swallowing the rebellious men and their possessions!

---end of excerpt---

The lesson is clear for us today. We should be immersed into the Word of God and His Salvation Process and never allow any type of a spirit of rebellion to creep into our minds. We should never seek to unseat those over us in the church because of envy, jealousy, pride or the desire for power and position. We should never allow anyone to gossip, murmur against nor tear down anyone in leadership. Korah was not just rebelling against Moses and Aaron but against God. Anyone today attempting to rebel against the leadership positions in the church, for those stated reasons and motivations would be doing the same.