

Numbers Chapter 16 Continued

In the last lesson, 250 of the princes spoke out against Moses and Aaron.

Their leader was Korah.

God came against Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all of their families.

The earth opened up and swallowed their families, and everything that belonged to them.

All the men.

Not his sons (see Numbers 26:11), but all belonging to him who had associated themselves with him in this rebellion.

Verses 32, 35

The LORD ultimately killed “all the men that appertained unto Korah ... and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense”.

It was true that all the congregation was holy (Exodus 19:6), but they failed to recognize that Moses and Aaron were God-appointed leaders.

Jude 11 describes the “rebellion of Korah” in the context of “ungodly men” who have “crept in unawares” into the church.

Numbers 16:32 "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that [appertained] unto Korah, and all [their] goods."

This was similar to an earthquake, but since it was on the request of Moses, it is supernatural.

The ground just opens up where these evil people are.

The area, which each of the three men ruled just went into a giant hole in the ground.

The people, and everything perished instantly.

Dathan and Abiram, their wives, sons, and little ones, that stood at the door of their tents with them, and all their goods, as follows.

The earth, as if it was a living creature or a beast of prey, opened its mouth and swallowed them up, as such a creature does its prey.

"And their houses":

Which may be meant both of their families or households, and of the tents they dwelt in, which were their houses (see Deut. 1:6).

"And all the men that appertained unto Korah":

Not Korah himself, for he was with the two hundred fifty men that had censers, and with Aaron at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation offering incense.

And thereby making trial to whom the priesthood belonged.

And who, it is highly probable, perished by fire with the two hundred fifty men, as Josephus, Aben Ezra, and others are of opinion.

But the family of Korah, and not all of them, for his sons died not at that time (Num. 26:11).

And there were of his posterity in the times of David, to whom several of the psalms are inscribed (Psalm 42:1).

These were either out of the way upon business, (the providence of God so ordering it for their safety), or they disliked the proceedings of their father, and joined not with him.

Or if they did at first, repented of it and forsook him, as it is probable on of the tribe of Reuben also did, since no mention is made of him in the destruction.

"And all their goods":

Their household goods, their substance and riches, their gold, silver, cattle, and whatever they were possessed of.

We see in this that anything or anyone closely associated with Korah, Dathan and Abiram, was destroyed right along with them.

This was instant punishment from God against them, because they came against Moses and Aaron, God's anointed.

Numbers 16:33 "They, and all that [appertained] to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation."

The grave which the opening earth made for them, they and their families.

"And the earth closed upon them":

And covered them over.

This it did of itself, as Aben Ezra remarks.

This was a wonderful instance of almighty power, that it should open in such large fissures as to swallow up such a number of men.

With their tents, goods, and cattle, and then close again so firmly.

As not to have the least appearance upon it of what had happened, as Josephus observes.

"And they perished from among the congregation":

And had a name and a place no more with them.

They did not go the way of the grave.

The earth swallowed them alive.

This was a tremendous number of people, into the tens of thousands, who perished.

Numbers 16:34 "And all Israel that [were] round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up [also]."

Or because of it, as Aben Ezra.

Their cry was so loud, their shrieks so dreadful and piercing, that the Israelites about them fled to get out of the sound of them, as well as for their own safety.

The Targum of Jonathan not only represents their cry as terrible, but gives the words they expressed at it.

"And all Israel that were round about them fled, because of the terror of their voice, when they cried and said, the LORD is righteous and His judgments truth, and truth are the words of Moses His servant, but we are wicked who have rebelled against Him."

"For they said, lest the earth swallow us up also":

Which they might fear, since they had provoked the LORD, by associating with these men, and countenancing them by their presence, as they had done.

Who would have consumed them in a moment at first, had it not been for the intercession of Moses and Aaron.

Fear gripped the heart of all the Israelites.

They ran for safety so that the earth would not engulf them too.

Numbers 16:35 "And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense."

Flashes of lightning from the cloud in which He was.

"And consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense":

Not that it reduced them to ashes, but took away their lives, struck them dead at once, in like manner as Nadab and Abihu were.

Who though said to be devoured by the fire, yet their bodies remained (Lev. 10:2).

And is often the case of persons killed by lightning.

Though Josephus thinks they were so consumed as that their bodies were no more seen.

And who is express for it that Korah perished with them in this manner.

Which is not improbable, since he took his censer and offered incense with them, and was the ringleader of them.

And the person that contended with Aaron for the priesthood, which was to be determined in this way.

And though he is not mentioned it may be concluded, as Aben Ezra observes, by an argument from the lesser to the greater.

That if the men he drew in perished, much more he himself.

And the same writer observes, that in the song of the Red sea, no mention is made of the drowning of Pharaoh in it, only of his chariots and his host.

And yet he himself was certainly drowned.

Now these men burning incense which belonged only to the priests of the LORD, were by just retaliation consumed by fire.

And which made it plainly appear they were not the priests of the LORD.

And the judgment on them was the more remarkable, that Moses and Aaron, who stood by them, remained unhurt.

This was an emblem of the vengeance of eternal fire, of everlasting burnings (Jude 1:11).

This fire from the LORD is separate from the opening of the earth.

This is divine judgement from the LORD Himself.

This is very similar to the fire that earlier came from the Holy of Holies, and killed Aaron's two eldest sons.

They had committed a sin similar to the strange fire of Aaron's son.

This judgement was directly from God.

They were still in the tabernacle with their incense, when God killed them.

Verses 36-40

The 250 leaders of Israel had brought censers filled with fire before the LORD (16:17-18).

The censers were holy to the LORD since they had been used in the tabernacle.

Therefore, Eleazar was commanded to hammer out the metal censers into a covering for the altar.

That covering was to be a perpetual reminder that God had chosen Aaron and his descendants for the priesthood.

Israel's next high priest was instructed to gather all the holy censers used illegally by these would-be priests.

They were then beaten into metal covering plates for the altar, as a constant reminder of the fearful cost of rebellion.

Numbers 16:36 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

Immediately after these men were consumed by fire from Him; out of the same cloud from whence that proceeded, He spoke.

"Saying":

As follows.

This is a break in the message, with a new message from the LORD for Moses.

Numbers 16:37 "Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed."

His eldest son, that was to succeed him as high priest, and who perhaps was upon the spot to see the issue of things.

And who, rather than Aaron, is bid to do what follows.

Partly because Aaron was now officiating, burning incense, and that he might not be defiled with the dead bodies.

And partly because it was more proper and decent for the son to do it than the father.

And it may be also because it was for the further confirmation of the priesthood in the posterity of Aaron.

"That he take up the censers out of the burning":

Either out from among the dead bodies burnt with fire from the LORD, or out of the burning of the incense in them.

These were the censers of Korah and the two hundred fifty men with him.

"And scatter thou the fire yonder":

The fire that was in the censers.

The incense burning in them was to be cast out and scattered here and there, or carried to some unclean place at a distance.

As a token of the rejection of the services of these men.

And thus, the LORD answered the prayer of Moses, that he would not have respect to their offering (Num. 16:15), if incense is intended there.

Though that seems to refer only to Dathan and Abiram, and not to these two hundred fifty men.

"For they are hallowed":

Incense being offered in them before the LORD, and therefore were not to be made use of in common service.

When the princes died, that left 250 censers burning in the tabernacle.

Even though the burning of these censers was not approved of God, the censers and the fire in them was holy.

They were holy and could not be taken back into their homes.

They had to be disposed of in a holy manner.

Eleazar was next in line to be high priest, so God had him to take care of this.

Verses 38-40

All 250 Levites challenging Aaron's leadership (16:8-11), were "consumed" by fire while "offering incense (8:16-19).

This affirmed that the priesthood belonged only to Aaron and his line.

Eleazar made a "memorial" from the "censers" as a visual reminder to the Israelites, beware the consequences of questioning the sovereign decisions of God by opposing His anointed leaders (Jude 11).

Numbers 16:38 "The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates [for] a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel."

Who by burning incense in them sinned, and by sinning hurt and ruined their souls.

"Let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar":

The altar of burnt offering, which, though it had a covering of brass, another made of these were to be over it.

For the further security of it, being of from the fire continually burning on it.

These censers were to be beaten into broad plates, by the workmen who understood how to do it.

"For they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed":

They offered them in His presence, they burned incense in them, and to Him, though it was not their business, but the business of the priests.

Yet these being done, and by His orders, for an open trial who were His priests and who not, they were not to be put to common use.

"And they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel":

A memorial sign.

A sign bringing this affair to remembrance, as it is explained in (Num. 16:40).

This was a sign to the priests, that they only were to offer every kind of offerings. And to the Levites, who attended the priests at the altar continually.

And so, had every day a sight of it and of those plates upon it, which would remind them of this fact, and teach them not to usurp the priest's office.

And to all the children of Israel, to learn from hence that none were to burn incense but the priests of the LORD.

For doing which Uzziah, though a king, was punished (2 Chron. 26:18).

The censers were used to broaden the altar.

They were a constant reminder of the sin of these 250 princes.

Numbers 16:39 "And Eleazar the priest took the brasen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad [plates for] a covering of the altar:"

The metal of which these censers were made is particularly observed, to show that they were fit for the use they were ordered to be put unto.

Namely, for a covering of the altar of burnt offering, which was covered with brass.

That being very suitable, since fire was continually burning on it.

And by this it appears that these censers were different from those of Aaron and his sons.

For theirs were silver ones.

The high priest on the day of atonement indeed made use of a golden one, but at all other times he used a silver one.

And so did the common priests every day, morning and night, when they offered incense.

"Wherewith they that were burnt had offered":

The two hundred fifty men burnt with fire from the LORD, having offered incense to Him with the brazen censers.

"And they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar":

Not by Eleazar, but by workmen skilled in the art of drawing or beating any kind of metal into thin plates.

By the direction and order of Eleazar.

This just means they were melted, and made into a wide plate to cover the altar. Remember, brass and bronze speak of judgement.

Numbers 16:40 "[To be] a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which [is] not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses."

The whole body of them.

This explains what is meant by sign (Num. 16:38).

That it was to put or keep in mind what follows.

"That no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD":

Not only any Gentile but any Israelite.

And not any Israelite only, but any Levite.

None but those of the family of Aaron might offer incense before the LORD.

"That he be not as Korah and as his company":

This makes it clear that Korah perished at this time, though it is nowhere expressed.

And it seems pretty plain from hence that he perished by fire, as his company, the two hundred fifty men with censers did.

"As the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses":

Either to Korah, who is the immediate antecedent, and who perished as the LORD had told him by Moses he should.

So some understand it, mentioned by Aben Ezra and Jarchi

Or else to Aaron, as they interpret it

And then the sense is, that none but those of Aaron's seed should offer incense, as the LORD had declared to him by Moses (see Num. 3:10).

Or it may be rather to Eleazar, as Abendana, who did as the LORD spake to him by Moses.

Took up the censers of the men that were burnt, and got them beaten into broad plates, and covered the altar of burnt offering with them.

This was a sign to the people, that only those chosen of God for the purpose should serve at the altar.

The priesthood was from generation to generation of Aaron's descendants.

By the time of Jesus on the earth, the priesthood had been greatly degraded.

Some were even buying their position as priests.

Verses 41-50

Instead of bringing about the repentance of the people, the LORD's wrath only led to more complaining.

Though the children of Israel held Moses and Aaron accountable for the people who had been killed by the LORD, it was the intervention of Moses and Aaron for the entire nation that saved them from destruction because of their opposition to God.

It is nearly unbelievable that after the divine judgments, which were so clearly the work of Yahweh, the people held "Moses and Aaron" responsible for the calamities.

Verses 41-44

"Ye have killed the people of the LORD":

This statement is possible the high-water mark of brazen and blasphemous insolence on the part of Israel.

After witnessing the super-natural, terrifying sight of the ground opening, the dreadful flames belching forth, and hearing the screams of the doomed trouble makers, they now uttered pious nonsense and accused Moses, a mere man, of doing all of this.

Numbers 16:41 "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD."

The day following the dreadful catastrophe, the earth swallowing up Dathan and Abiram, and all that belonged to them.

And the burning of Korah and the two hundred fifty men of his company.

"All the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron":

Not the princes and heads of the people only, but the whole body of them.

Though the above persons that murmured against them had but the day before been made such dreadful examples of divine vengeance.

And yet, notwithstanding this shocking scene of things, they fell into the same evil.

And murmur against the men, whose authority, being called in question, had been confirmed by the above awful instances.

"Saying, ye have killed the people of the LORD":

So they called the rebels, and hereby justified them in all the wickedness they had been guilty of.

And though their death was so manifestly by the immediate hand of God, yet they lay it to the charge of Moses and Aaron.

This is truly an evil generation, that cannot see that God killed them.

They seem to never learn, and the congregation begins to blame Moses and Aaron for the death of those God killed.

The sinners actually brought death upon themselves, because of their sins.

Numbers 16:42 "And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared."

To kill them, as the Targum of Jonathan adds.

Who, perhaps, upon uttering their murmurs, made up to them.

And by their gestures showed an intention to murder them.

"That they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation":

Either the people did, to see whether they could observe any appearance of the displeasure of God against them.

Or rather Moses and Aaron looked that way for help and deliverance in this extreme danger, knowing there was no salvation for them but of the LORD (Jer. 3:23).

"And, behold, the cloud covered it":

As when it was first erected, and which was a token of the divine Presence (Num. 9:15).

Perhaps it had dispersed immediately upon the death of the rebels, and now returned again in favor of the servants of the LORD.

"And the glory of the LORD appeared":

In the cloud, as in (Num. 16:19); to encourage Moses and Aaron, and to deliver them out of the hands of the people, and to the terror of them.

It appears, they were near the tabernacle, when they began accusing Moses and Aaron.

The presence of the LORD had hovered over the tabernacle.

Now, this presence comes closer down to the tabernacle.

The glory of the LORD appeared to the congregation.

Numbers 16:43 "And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation."

Whose tent was not far from it, about which the people of Israel were gathered.

And from whence they came to the tabernacle, both for shelter and safety, and for advice and instruction how to behave in this crisis.

They did not go into it, but stood before it.

The LORD being in the cloud over it, they stood in the door of it (Num. 16:50).

Moses and Aaron came near to the presence, to see what God would say.

Numbers 16:44 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

Out of the cloud.

"Saying":

As follows.

Even though the congregation was there, the LORD spoke specifically to Moses.

Numbers 16:45 "Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces."

That is, withdraw from them, and be separate.

That they might not be involved in the same destruction with them, as well as that they might have no concern for them.

Or plead with the LORD in prayer on their account, but let Him alone to destroy them, as follows.

"That I may consume them as in a moment":

As He was able to do, and had proposed to do it before.

But they entreated Him that He would not (Num. 16:21), as they again do.

Again, God prepared to destroy the nation, but again Israel was saved by the intercession of Moses.

Nevertheless, 14,700 people died in a divine plague before Moses' prayers became effective.

"And they fell upon their faces":

In prayer, as the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem.

And so Aben Ezra observes, it was to pray to deprecate the wrath of God, and to implore His pardoning mercy for this sinful people.

Which shows what an excellent temper and disposition these men were of.

To pray for them that had so despitefully used them as to charge them with murder, and were about to commit it on them (see Matt. 5:44).

God tells Moses to move away from the congregation, so that He can kill them all.

Moses and Aaron fall upon their faces before the LORD.

They are horrified, because they have already lost so many, and now God wants to kill them all.

Numbers 16:46 "And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun."

“Incense”:

Incense was symbolic of prayer.

Aaron interceded to prayer and the plague stopped (verse 48).

This censer is the censer used by the high priest on the day of atonement.

Moses tells Aaron to get fire of the altar and incense, and go among the people to get atonement for them, lest they all die.

The wrath is shown in a plague that goes among the people killing them.

The smoke from this censer of incense is like the prayers of the saints.

Numbers 16:47 "And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people."

A censer with fire in it from the altar, and also incense.

"And ran into the midst of the congregation":

Though a man in years and in so high an office, and had been so ill used by the people.

Yet was not only so ready to obey the divine command, but so eager to serve this ungrateful people.

And save them from utter destruction, that he ran from the tabernacle into the midst of them.

"And, behold, the plague was begun among the people":

He saw them fall down dead instantly in great numbers.

"And he put on incense":

Upon the fire in the censer, which though it was not in common lawful to burn but in the holy place on the altar of incense.

Yet, upon this extraordinary occasion, it was dispensed with by the LORD, as it had been the day before when he offered it at the door of the tabernacle with the two hundred fifty men of Korah's company.

And perhaps the reason of it now was, that the people might see Aaron perform this kind of office for them, and give them a fresh convincing proof of his being invested with the office of priesthood from the LORD.

Or otherwise he could have done this in its proper place, the sanctuary.

"And made an atonement for the people":

By offering incense, which God smelt a sweet savor in, and accepted of, and his wrath was appeased and the plague stayed.

In this Aaron was a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of his mediation, atonement, and intercession.

Wrath is gone forth from God for the sins of men, which is revealed in the law.

And death, the effect of it, has taken place on many in every sense of it, corporeal, spiritual, and eternal.

Christ, as Mediator, in pursuance of his suretyship engagements, has made atonement for the sins of His people by the sacrifice of Himself.

And now ever lives to make intercession for them, which is founded upon His sacrifice and satisfaction, His sufferings and death.

Signified by the fire in which the incense was put.

Notice, Aaron ran to get the censer.

He knew every second he delayed meant lives lost.

He made atonement for the people.

Our people will be destroyed, unless they receive forgiveness and atonement in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 48-50

"And he stood between the dead and the living":

Here Moses becomes a remarkable type of a New Testament soul-winner (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

Numbers 16:48 "And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed."

The plague beginning at one end of the camp, and so proceeded on.

Aaron placed himself between that part of it wherein it had made havoc, and that wherein yet it was not come.

The Targum of Jonathan is, "he stood in prayer in the middle, and made a partition, with his censer, between the dead and living."

In this he was a type of Christ, the Mediator between God and man.

The living God and dead sinners.

For though his atonement and intercession are not made for the dead in a corporeal sense, nor for those who have sinned, and sin unto death, the unpardonable sin, nor for men appointed unto death, but for the living in Jerusalem, or for those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Yet for those who are dead in sin, and as deserving of eternal death as others, whereby they are saved from everlasting ruin.

"And the plague was stayed":

It proceeded no further than where Aaron stood and offered his incense.

And made atonement.

So the consequence of the atonement and intercession of Christ is, that the wrath of God sin deserves comes not upon those that have a share therein.

The second death shall not seize upon them.

Nor they be hurt with it.

For, being justified by the blood of Christ, and atonement for their sins being made by His sacrifice, they are saved from wrath to come.

Numbers 16:49 "Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah."

"Fourteen thousand and seven hundred":

See (1 Cor. 10:10).

This 14,700 are in addition to the tens of thousands that died with Korah.

They are also in addition to the 250 princes God killed with the fire.

What must happen before they will believe God, and stop rebelling against Him?

I might ask, what has to happen in our land, before we realize what we are doing, and return to God?

2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Numbers 16:50 "And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed."

After he had by his atonement and intercession put a stop to the wrath of God broken forth upon the people.

"Unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation":

Where Moses was waiting for his return, and to know the issue of this affair.

"And the plague was stayed":

Even before Aaron left the camp, and is here repeated for the certainty of it.

And to intimate that it continued to cease, and broke not out again.

The main lesson in these last few verses, is the fact that the high priest went in among the people praying.

This means to me, that ministers must first see the problem, and get out with the people to change it.

The problems in our land today are not drugs, alcohol, wife beating, incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, cheating, stealing, lying, and in all the other things we see the problems.

The problem with our land is the fact we are out of fellowship with God.

The true cancer in our society is sin.

If we had a national revival, we would be rid of all the sins I just mentioned above.

They are not the true problem; they are what we see the problem causes.

Sin causes the problem.

Numbers Chapter 16 Continued Questions

1. How many princes spoke out against Moses and Aaron?
2. What happened to the family of Korah?
3. What happened to their belongings?
4. What were the names of the other two, whose families were destroyed?
5. What did it mean when it said, they "went down alive into the pit"?
6. How many died?
7. What did the rest of the Israelites do, when they saw the earth swallow them up?
8. What killed the 250 princes?
9. What is this judgement on the 250 similar to?
10. Who was to take up the censers from the 250 princes who died?
11. Why were the censers and the fire in them to be handled in the tabernacle?
12. What was done with the censers?
13. Brass, or bronze, speaks of _____.
14. Who are the only people who should minister?
15. What happened to the priesthood, by the time Jesus came to the earth?
16. Who murmured against Moses and Aaron?
17. What were they accusing them of?
18. What happened, when the congregation gathered at the tabernacle, to accuse Moses and Aaron?
19. Who drew near to the presence of God?
20. What did the LORD tell Moses to do, and why?
21. What do Moses and Aaron do, horrified of what might happen?
22. What did Moses tell Aaron to do with the censer?
23. Why was there such a hurry?
24. What is the smoke of that censer like?
25. How do we know Aaron hurried?

26. What is needed in our land today?
27. What is the main lesson, in this, for us?
28. What is the real problem in our land today?