

Numbers 16-17 - Korah's Revolution

By
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“That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.”

-Ecclesiastes 1:9

As I was studying Numbers 16 and 17 this week, which is unfortunately another account of rebellion by the people of Israel, this passage from Ecclesiastes stood out to me, both in relationship to this book and world history in general. In the context of this book, it feels as though we are stuck in a cycle of sin and judgement. This pattern began all the way back in chapter 11 when the people of Israel first set out to conquer the land of Canaan:

“Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched.”

-Numbers 11:1-2

This is unfortunately the pattern, the people of God complain against the provision of the Lord, and He sends some sort of judgement that wipes out the dissidents, Moses and Aaron intercede for the people, and then the cycle starts over again. This cycle is, in and of itself, evidence that the judgement of God in the previous chapters was not unjust or unwarranted. When God condemned the older generation to wander in the wilderness, He wasn't just judging their fear based decision to flee from the land when God had commanded them to conquer it, it was reflective of a fundamental constitution possessed by this generation.

Though the means of repentance and obedience were available to the people of Israel, they were unwilling to walk through this path of humility. Still, after all that they have seen, they are incapable of being honest with themselves or with God, as such they are stuck in a pattern of dysfunction and sin. It reminds me of a line from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous:

“Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates.”

-The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

While the Big Book is teaching people to specifically adhere to their “program”, the 12 steps are, in essence, a formulated version of Biblical repentance. And what they are describing above is unfortunately true. Those who are unable, or unwilling, to be honest with themselves will never be able to break free from various patterns of self-destruction. And we will see throughout these two chapters, honest self-reflection is not something that the nation of Israel is able or willing to do.

But in terms of world history this passage is true as well. Though these chapters describe another rebellion of the nation, this one takes on a new form. Instead of mere complaint or a violation of God’s commands, or even a vain attempt to overthrow Moses and Aaron, in this passage we see an attempted coup d’etat performed by various elite leaders within the nation.

“Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?”

-Numbers 16:1-3

We will talk more about this throughout this paper, but we see in this chapter a strange alliance of religious leaders, represented by Korah, and political leaders, represented by Dathan, Abiram, and On. These four individuals lead a rebellion of around 250 “men of renown” to overthrow the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Korah’s rebellion centers around the rights of the Levites. While all Levites served as priests, only Aaron’s family could serve in the temple.

Dathan, Abiram, and On seemed jealous of Moses’ authority over the people and access to God’s revelation. All these men had access to levels of prophecy and rule, Moses had supreme authority in the land. To put this point more simply, this is a revolt against hierarchy.

Moses and Aaron respond to this rebellion by proposing a test that would allow God to judge between them. They would all make offerings of incense before God, and God would vindicate the ones that He had chosen. This is another interesting element of this rebellion. The fact that these men were willing to make this offering to God tells us that they didn't actually think they were rebelling against God. To put this another way, they *sincerely* believed that what they were doing was right.

In response to this rebellion, God sends three consecutive judgements upon the nation. The first is an earthquake that swallows up Korah and the other leaders of this coup, the second is a fire that consumes the other 250 members of the coup, and then a plague which kills over fourteen thousand of the people of Israel. But to end this account, God receives the incense of Aaron and stops the plague, and then sends a positive sign in which He allows Aaron's rod to come back to life and sprout almonds.

We will talk about the symbolism of all these miracles throughout this paper, but for now I wanted to focus on the unique element of this rebellion. Unlike the previous rebellions which were mainly a form of anarchy against God, this rebellion takes on the guise of "equality". Meaning that the people leading the coup are not overtly calling for a new leader to take control, but merely criticizing the current leadership and pushing for a more egalitarian society led by the people and for the people.

Because of this, this rebellion is more reflective of the French Revolution led by Maximilien Robespierre and the Jacobins or the Russian Revolution led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks than say the fascist revolutions of Mussolini or Hitler. Though the French and Russian revolutions eventually became authoritarian, they presented themselves as revolutions for the people. The three slogans for the French Revolution were "equality, liberty, and brotherhood." And for the Russian Revolution, all the leaders called themselves "comrade", assuming the title of a "brother" or "friend" and not a leader.

But, as with the rebellion in Israel, the envious hearts of the men cultivating the fires of revolution were set ablaze by envy and not altruism. And we can be sure that if Korah and his ilk had succeeded in overthrowing Moses and Aaron, the end of the nation wouldn't be that different than the end of the French or Russian Revolution. But since God sees through the posturing of these wicked men, He supernaturally stops their revolution in particularly poetic ways.

So, for the rest of this paper I wanted to focus on the three plagues that God sends in order to understand this lesson in greater detail, and then we will end on a more hopeful note as we study the positive miracle that God sends that allows for the dead rod of Aaron to come back to life.

The Pit and the Fire

“And Moses said: “By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. “If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. “But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD.” Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up also!” And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

-Numbers 16:28-35

As with all the miracles of God, the nature of this judgement is not random but is a symbol sent by God to instruct His people for all time. And being a symbol, it is not without its sense of poetic irony. The first irony that we see is that God literally parodies an exaggeration made by the people of Israel during their initial rebellion in Numbers 13. After the spies delivered their bad report of the land that was intended to cause a rebellion against the call of God, they make this interesting hyperbolic statement about the land of Canaan:

“The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants...”

-Numbers 13:32

The spies claimed that the land itself was monstrous and that it “devoured” its inhabitants. In this passage, God turns the words of the faithless Israelites against them and has the land literally devour the leaders of this rebellion. More than simple irony, God intends a bigger message concerning this judgement and I think we get a clue to what this message might be when we consider the curse that God places on Cain after he murders his brother.

“And He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. “So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. “When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.”

-Genesis 4:10-12

Notice that the earth that receives the “seed” of Abel (his potential offspring) refuses the literal seed of Cain. He is “cursed” from the earth in a way that he will never fully succeed. This doesn’t stop Cain from building the first civilization on the blood of his brother, but in an ultimate sense, Cain never builds a functional society; only an oppressive and envious ethos that haunts the rest of his descendants.

“Then Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

-Genesis 4:23-24

But in this passage we get a type of parody of Cain’s curse. Cain is, in some ways, rejected by the earth, while these men are consumed by it. By making a parody of this earlier story, God is drawing our attention to the account of Cain and Abel. By doing this I believe that God is revealing the motives of these men, but He is also drawing a parallel between the spirit of these men and the spirit of Cain. These patterns then show themselves in the two curses that God sends, the earthquake that swallows the leaders and the fires that consume the notable men who supported the rebellion. Let’s first begin with the fire.

Fires of Self-exaltation

Though the plagues move in (what I believe) is an ironic order, namely the darkness of the chasm precedes the judgement by fire, we will go through the curses in reverse order to better understand this pattern. The great irony of the curse of the pit is that these men focus on the “exaltation” of Moses and Aaron. In their “populist” revolt they promise the people that they will exalt them. They feed into the envious hearts of the people and tell them that Moses and Aaron shouldn’t exalt themselves above the people, but that all the people should be exalted and lifted up. But the effect of their rebellion is the opposite, instead of lifting the populace up, it merely brings them down into the pit.

This helps us understand another facet of the symbol of fire. In the previous study on Numbers 11 we focused on the fire as a symbol of envy and ravenous desire. This symbol is reflected in an interesting Proverb:

“The grave, The barren womb, The earth that is not satisfied with water—And the fire never says, “Enough!”

-Proverbs 30:16

Since this story is, in some ways, a parody of Cain, this symbol still fits here. But there is another element at play that is also reflected in the fire. Fire is also an element that exalts itself. Meaning that when a flame is lit, it naturally “attracts” upwards towards a point. This symbolism is actually one of the reasons why God associates Himself with fire, and why He manifests Himself in the burning bush in the beginning of Exodus and as a “pillar” of fire to lead the nation in the darkness. This is also why fire is a symbol of offering before the Lord, both in burnt offerings, but also in the incense offerings (which is what God calls the self-proclaimed leaders to offer in this chapter). And since God’s glory is truly above all else, His association with fire is correct.

However, Hell is also depicted as a fire. Partially because of the symbolism of envy that we previously talked about, but also because of the sin most associated with Hell, pride:

For you have said in your heart:

“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.”

-Isaiah 14:13-15

The sin of Satan was self-exaltation. His envy towards God drove him to try to supplant God’s rule, and his temptation in the Garden of Eden towards mankind was to do the same, to become gods in their own eyes. To reject the all present light of God, and to construct their own light by which they could guide their own path. This is an aside, but this is one of the reasons why in Greek mythology Prometheus offends the gods by stealing fire from the heavens to give to mankind. This is also the sin of Cain:

“Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”

-Genesis 4:4-8

Cain’s sin was the same as all narcissist’s, envious desire for unearned exaltation and praise. God accepted Abel’s offering, not because He arbitrarily favored Abel, but because Abel’s offering was “acceptable”. God’s admonishment to Cain was not to tell him that God simply preferred Abel and Cain would have to deal with that rejection, it is

“if you do well, will you not be accepted?” God gives Cain the upward call to emulate his brother's success. But instead of trying to emulate his brother, he murders his brother in an act of envious self-exaltation. Notice in the text we are told that he “*rose up* against Abel his brother and killed him.” In killing his brother, Cain exalted himself against his brother and tried to “ascend” to Abel’s position without earning praise through his own works.

This is shown in this rebellion. The leaders of this rebellion pretend that they want equality, but they are clearly interested in exaltation. The first evidence we see of this is found in their lineage. We are told that three of the leaders, the ones who represent the political aims of this coup, are descended from Reuben. Although Reuben was the firstborn from Jacob, he never attained to leadership amongst his brothers due to his various character flaws. Because of this, he resented the position of Joseph and, later, the position of Judah. We know this through his betrayal of Joseph, and later through a curse given to him by his own father later on:

“Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father’s bed; Then you defiled it— He went up to my couch.”

-Genesis 49:3-4

Notice that he “went up” to his father’s bed. This seems to be a reference to Reuben sleeping with one of Jacob’s concubines, and in this passage we receive his motive. It wasn’t love, or even lust, for this woman, it was an attempt to assert himself above his brothers by “taking” his father’s place. And the curse given to him is the same as Cain, and the same as these men, “you shall not excel”, or to put that another way, in his attempt to rise up, he was brought down.

This is exactly what happens to these men. In trying to rise above Moses and Aaron, they are brought down into the pit. But notice their own speech and how it, unintentionally, reveals their heart:

“You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?”

-Numbers 16:3

“Why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly...” In clinical terms, this is called projection. We have seen throughout this book, and Exodus, that this is exactly the

opposite of Moses' true character. Even in this story, when this charge is laid against him Moses reacts by falling on his face. While Moses does have his own sins, self-exaltation is not one of them. Quite the opposite, Moses has consistently resented his authority and tried to be rid of it on numerous occasions. It is these men who desire to exalt themselves, but they project their own negative spirit onto the character of Moses. Moses calls them out directly for this:

"Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: "Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; "and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? "Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"

-Numbers 16:8-11

These are men who are not satisfied with what God has given them, men who only want what others have. This is another center of pride. Pride is always exalting itself by lowering other people. A proud person will only feel valued when they are running down the value of another person, which is again why God curses them by making them "descend" into the earth. The proud person claims to want to elevate others, but they are only interested in exalting themselves at the expense of others. Satan promises to exalt man, but only succeeds in bringing them down. And all such people who claim this right for themselves will meet the same fate, both individually and all who follow them.

The Bottomless Pit

"Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit."

-Revelation 9:1-2

This leads us to the first symbol, the bottomless pit. When the earth "swallows" the men, it is a picture of their trajectory, and a universal symbol throughout Scripture and other literature. The "bottomless pit" is a symbol of infinite destruction. This same symbol is shown to us in numerous formats, like for instance the zombie. A zombie is an animated corpse, as such, although it is "alive" it is in a state of eternal decay. This is another symbol of Hell:

“And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

-Isaiah 66:24

This is an inversion of Heavenly glory. Heaven is a place of infinite renewal and redemption. As God Himself puts it:

“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”

-Revelation 21:3-5

The word used here for “make” is in the present progressive tense in the original Greek. What this means is that heaven is a place in which God is *constantly* making all things new. It is a place of infinite rejuvenation, which is why mankind has always looked up to the, seemingly, infinite expanse of the sky and deemed them the “heavens”. But Hell is the inverse of this. Instead of infinite light and rejuvenation, it is a place of infinite ignorance, darkness, and desecration. We will talk more about this in a second, but the siren song of most revolutionaries is that things can’t possibly be worse than they are. This is not true. Things can never be so bad that some fool can’t make them worse.

Stranded in the wilderness with no hope of being delivered, you can see how many people in Israel would believe the call of these false leaders. They would think, “what could be lost by following them? This is as bad as things can get.” But this thought is always wrong. There is no such thing as rock bottom, things can always be worse, which is why God opens the, seemingly, solid ground, and drops these men into the pit.

This is also an answer to their real desire, to ignore the light of God.

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

-John 3:19-21

We see this desire in Cain after he kills Abel:

“Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.”

-Genesis 4:16

He departs the “light” of God and moves towards the land of “Nod”, which literally means “aimless wandering”. This is a picture of unconsciousness and ignorance. A desire to wander aimlessly in the wilderness as opposed to see the truth of God. We see this willful ignorance in these leaders:

“And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, “We will not come up! “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 should keep acting like a prince over us? “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!”

-Numbers 16:12-14

The level of willful ignorance present in this statement is almost unbelievable. They actually call the nation of Egypt a land “flowing with milk and honey”. This is similar to Numbers 11 when the people complained about not having the herbs and food of Egypt, ignoring their own slavery and oppression, but it is even worse. In their completely fictional version of events, Moses rose up as a tyrant to bring them away from a land of plenty to kill them in the wilderness.

In some ways, what is happening to Israel is very similar to the ten plagues of Egypt. In order for Pharaoh to maintain his moral high ground, he had to tell himself a twisted version of events in which he was a victim of the Jews and not the other way around. This is why Pharaoh was so unstable, promising deliverance in one statement and then threatening in the next. These men have the same problem. They complain against God in one second, and then beg His forgiveness in the next. And just as God blots out the sun of Egypt, so He swallows these men in darkness to reflect their true desires, to ignore the light of reality in order to bathe in the darkness of their own false narrative.

Modern Examples

This is the effect of all the people’s revolutions that I mentioned earlier. They begin with a powerful envy in which the revolutionary leaders point to the “exaltation” of the elite. They complain about their wealth, power, and prosperity and point out the poverty and struggles of the common people. They point out how “unfair” this situation is and how

the only reason why the elites have been exalted is by standing on the backs of the people. Of course when we accept this as a premise, it only makes sense that if the elites were stripped of their riches, a more just and equitable society would naturally emerge as a result.

Karl Marx, the man who created the seed bed for the most violent and bloody “peoples revolutions” that the world has ever seen wrote this about the nature of the world:

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the struggling classes.”

-Karl Marx; Friedrich Engels - “The Communist Manifesto”

Notice his view. The entire history of the world is merely the history of oppressor and oppressed. The elites who exalt themselves at the cost of the common person, and the oppressed victim of this exaltation who have to sit under the oppression of their wicked master. This is almost identical to the philosophy of Cain. Cain doesn't see the success of his brother as something to emulate, but instead as something to lash out at, and the pattern of this folly is written throughout the pages of the Bible as well as the pages of world history.

This is why in Numbers the leaders say that Moses and Aaron “take too much on themselves”, meaning that they have taken more than their “fair share” of authority. This is what all these revolutionaries preach. The elites have taken “too much” upon themselves, how is it fair that we struggle in our finances when the elites have more than enough? Are we not all God's children? Are we not also worthy of the same prosperity as them?

This will always sound righteous and equitable, but it all descends from the same rotten root, the root of envy. This speech is not really about the success of others, but instead a bitterness surrounding our own perceived failures and our own desires for more than what we have. Unfortunately our society is increasingly possessed by this same spirit. We tear down the statues of famous men saying boldly that they don't deserve statues because of their sins.

The problem with this attitude is that it misses the point of why we erect statues in the first place. We aren't artificially exalting other people and ignoring their faults, we are

“holding up” the truly amazing achievements of great men and women. It is similar to how we revere the various figures we find in Scripture, like Moses, even though they are flawed in many obvious and destructive ways. To be sure, idolatry exists in the heart of man and we have a tendency to worship men as gods, but at its core, this is not why we build statues of venerated “heroes” in Scripture and in history.

It is similar to our attitude towards models. We were told that the unattainable beauty of models made young people self-conscious. The problem is that it isn't the beauty of the models that create those feelings, but our own envy. To be fair, I am not a huge fan of models, but for very different reasons. The first would be that they tend to elevate an unhealthy lifestyle. Some models attain their beauty through unhealthy practices that should be avoided. I also have a problem with the oversexualization of the modeling industry, showing off the bodies of men and women in a way that is gratuitous.

But, as a matter of course, every society has had their versions of models. Whether we look at Michaelangelo's statue of David or Botticelli's “Birth of Venus”, there has always been an ideal of beauty. Just as there are ideals of intelligence, wealth, business acumen, leadership, success, and virtue. We can't dispose of models, because models represent an ideal that we ought to aim for. But the spirit of Cain is to envy the success of others and become bitter and self-conscious over our own inadequacies. This is why Christ had to be crucified. To see a man who was superior to all others in every conceivable way was completely unacceptable to those who prided themselves on their own righteousness, virtue, and nearness to God.

Instead of seeing Him as the ideal that they should aim for, He became a constant reminder of everything that they weren't. And like Cain and Korah before them, they plotted His downfall so that they might be exalted. And again, this same attitude is coloring our current culture. This is why we have pushed for “diverse” models who represent all body types. This is why we see our elites wearing shirts that say “eat the rich” and why we denigrate the richest among us.

And, whether you like him or not, this is one of the reasons why we wanted to elect a man like Donald Trump who doesn't represent any higher moral ideals. This is also why we actually revel in things like cancel culture and are so scintillated at gossip describing the moral failings of our elite class. Though as Christians we should be all for accountability, it is one of the negative spirits behind the Epstein obsession. We almost *long* to read these files that we might see the richest and most powerful among us brought down in disgrace.

When Fyodor Dostoevsky saw this same spirit animating his own nation, shortly before their own “people’s revolution” he said this:

“For man loves to see the downfall and disgrace of the righteous.”
-Fyodor Dostoevsky - *“The Brothers Karamazov”*

But any movement that is animated by a hatred of success can’t possibly create anything but a downward momentum that results in darkness, death, and decay. Which is why God tells Moses and Aaron to commemorate the failure of this revolution:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. “The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel.” So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.”

-Numbers 16:36-40

Everytime the nation made an offering to God they would see the bronze on the altar that came from their false leaders preaching envy masquerading as virtue. They were supposed to reflect and remember that the way to find peace in our souls is not to judge our fellow man, but to find forgiveness before God. No matter how many statues we tear down, no matter how many participation trophies we award ourselves, no matter how much we condemn various forms of models, none of this will ever make us feel satisfied with ourselves. The only way to find peace in our souls is to accept the grace of God that is freely offered to us by the person Jesus Christ. More on this later.

The Plague

“On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of the LORD.” Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” And they fell on their faces. So Moses said to Aaron,

“Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun.” Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.”
-Numbers 16:41-50

The next judgement is probably the easiest to understand. Like we have talked about in previous chapters, a sinful attitude is contagious. This is how ideology works. It begins in the minds of the elite, but then it filters through to the population and spreads like wildfire. And, unfortunately, they are far more contagious than positive feelings and virtue. This is exactly how sickness works. A small virus can spread rapidly throughout a community, but health is not really contagious. Meaning that a perfectly healthy person can't "spread" their health to others, they can only *inspire* others to health. However, sickness *is* contagious and it does spread without the will of others to participate in it. This is why God tells the people to literally distance themselves from these toxic influences:

“So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’” Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, “Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins.”
-Numbers 16:23-26

God is telling His people to avoid these individuals “like the plague”. To keep away from them knowing that their ideas are genuinely contagious. Unfortunately this is just how our natures work. We can surround ourselves with positive influences all we want, we can attend church, listen to pastors, read the Bible, pray, but none of these things will have an effect on us unless we willfully participate in them by our faith. Without our faith, without our participation, they are merely dead rituals (we will talk more about that in a second when we speak of Aaron's rod.)

But sin doesn't work that way. Take alcohol for an extreme example. Merely imbibing the alcohol will have an effect on us, whether we want it to or not. This can even happen against our will. Let's say someone, without our knowledge, “spikes” our drink with

alcohol or a narcotic. Even though we didn't choose to get drunk, and even though we don't want to get drunk, it is irrelevant, the effect is inevitable.

Not all sin works on this level, but they are all in this category. Even if someone doesn't want to succumb to lust, simply seeing lustful images, with or without our desire, can move us to lust. While we do have to "consent" to lust in order to participate with our imagination, sin has a gravity to it that simply doesn't exist in the world of virtue. It is for this reason that we are told to avoid "touching" sin:

"And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

-Matthew 5:30

As much as I might like to avoid the sin of lust and pornography, I know that I am tempted towards this sin. All it takes is a little push and the momentum of the sin pulls me towards it. Once again, this does not take away personal accountability, but unless we understand the "attraction" of sin, we will never be able to adequately fight it.

Ideas work in much the same way. Since we are empathetic, we are predisposed to "believe" what another person is telling us. This means that we are vulnerable to be manipulated and deceived. That means if we are near to someone who is trying to deceive us and warp our imagination, over time, it can have an effect if we aren't careful. This is why the Bible warns us about giving our attention to people like this:

"But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person."

-1 Corinthians 5:11

It is important to note that in the previous verse, Paul does tell Christians that we can relate to people in the world who are caught up in these sins. If the church failed to do that, we would fail to be salt and light to the world. But there is a caution here, a caution that would also apply to non-believers. We need to be careful about the contagiousness of sin, we must be conscious of our own frailty and which sins move our hearts away from God. Without this understanding we will make ourselves vulnerable to our own frailties.

In our modern age this wisdom is paramount. Because nowadays we don't have to "sit down" with someone in order to be influenced by them. Their "voice" enters our lives

through our phones, tvs, and computers. We have to be careful about the voices we entertain, the voices that we let in, and the effect that these voices can have on us.

This once again a mistake that the modern world makes all too often. We think that we can do away with hierarchy. And so we are afraid of the voices of all those who have positions of authority and power. But we willingly let in the voice of “the people”. Those who have been marginalized and shut out. Because we are skeptical of power, these voices seem to have a ring of truth to them simply because they come from outside the systems of power and control that we have revealed themselves to be so untrustworthy over the years.

This problem reminds me of George Orwell's book “Animal Farm”. In this book, he uses an allegorical form of storytelling to illustrate the Russian Revolution and how a revolution that was supposed to be for the people and by the people eventually raised up a dictator who was far worse than the Tsars that they had supplanted, Joseph Stalin. While there are a lot of twists and turns to the story that I won't get into right now, but what I will point out for the sake of this paper is that the reason why the animals trust the pigs, especially Napoleon who is the analogue for Stalin, even when they are becoming increasingly tyrannical is specifically because they aren't human.

But over time, they become more and more like the humans that they threw out, until the last lines of the book have the animals looking between the pigs and the other human farmers without being able to tell the difference between them. As with everything else, it isn't power that is the problem, it is the human heart that corrupts power. We have to remember that power and hierarchy descend from God Himself, they are not inherently bad, but they can be twisted towards bad. One of Orwell's points with this book is that you can't do away with hierarchy, it will always reassert itself.

And if we aren't aware of that fact, we create the exact amount of darkness for true tyranny to grow unencumbered by pushback. So even though these podcasters claim to be “one of us” and they will never be bought or sold and all these other platitudes. Such things never last forever, and those who claim that they can are usually trying to sell us something.

The reason why the American Revolution succeeded and the French and Russian revolutions failed, is that our founders understood that. Take this quote from the Federalist Papers, (a series of essays written to defend the Constitution) to see this:

“Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human

nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”

-James Madison - The Federalist Papers #51

You can't get rid of hierarchy, but you can place checks and balances upon it. This is why the founders of America *wanted* to keep power structures separate. They didn't want the political elites to also be the economic elite and the religious elite. They wanted these powers separate so that they could counter each other's ambition. There is something unnerving about this story in that we see a coalition of elites within the land, religious in Korah, political in Dathan, Abiram, and On, and social in the 250 men of renown.

What this represents is all power centers coming together to create “equality”. Just saying that statement out loud should show us how foolish this proposition is. How can a cadre of elites speak for the people? How can a coalition of power possibly create a more equitable future? This is another facet of all these revolutions. They project all societies' sins onto the ruling class and claim that if only the people “banded together” they could set up a utopian society. It is only by understanding this truth that we can begin to understand the end of this story.

Good Authority

“Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses—twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod. “And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. “Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. “And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you.” So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. And Moses placed the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness. Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the

children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod. And the LORD said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die." Thus did Moses; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did. So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! "Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD must die. Shall we all utterly die?"

-Numbers 17:2-13

God's response to the rebellion is, first, to use Aaron to intercede for his people, and second to bring his rod "back to life". The symbolism of the almonds is particularly important. In Exodus 25, God instructs the Israelites to craft a golden lampstand for the Tabernacle of meeting that would have seven "branches" that have the shape of almond branches.

While I don't know enough about Middle Eastern culture to say everything that almonds signify. But what I do know is that since almonds blossom at the end of winter, before spring gets going, it can be a symbol for new life, hopefulness, and God's providence. So a simple way to understand this miracle is that God is promising to "revive" the nation of Israel. That even though the older generation would be wiped out in their sin, the younger generation has hope to be brought back to life and take the land in their parent's stead.

Tying this symbol into the Tabernacle, it is important that the "light of God" dwells on the branches of the lampstand, giving light and instruction to the people. Aaron's rod specifically being an almond branch signifies this. He bears the responsibility of bringing God's light to the people. This is what Korah and the rest of the rebels didn't understand. God is not egalitarian, He does give differing talents, abilities, and power to different people, we will not all be equal. But, as the Scriptures teach us:

"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

-Luke 12:48

The leaders within any society have a heavy burden placed upon them. They will be held to a higher standard, be subject to more criticism than anyone else, and have a heavier burden. Power is not meant to be treated lightly, nor is it to be taken for granted. It is meant to be revered and held with caution and humility. This is one reason why God allows such criticism to come against His leadership. We need to be questioned and criticized to remind us of our frailties, our limits, and our need to grow.

Beyond that, there are two sides to this coin. In order to receive visions of heaven, the leaders must go down to the pit. In order for Moses to encounter God, he first has to be exiled in the wilderness for forty years, in order for Abraham to meet God he first has to suffer a break in his relationship with his nephew, and in order for Jacob to meet God he has to be brought to the end of his strength and even have his hip put out of socket.

Think again about the structure of the tree. In order for the tree to reach Heaven, its roots have to touch Hell. In order for Aaron's rod to come back to life, it must first suffer death. Those chosen to lead the people of God will also be asked to suffer so that we might understand the frailties of the people we lead, to have compassion for others and humility in ourselves. When I reflect on my own ministry I always think of the call that God gave to the apostle Paul:

"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

-Acts 9:16-17

Paul had to suffer before he could be used, he had to be humbled before he could be exalted. And it is this truth that is perfected in our Savior.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

-Philippians 2:5-11

Christ shows us the true path of power and hierarchy. He did not come to elevate Himself above others, though that was His right, He came to be humbled. To allow Himself to be rejected, beaten, and killed by the very people He came to save. In the envy of mankind, we don't understand that our feelings of inadequacy come from the reality that we are not enough for God, that we do fall short of His glory. The only way to repair that is to find acceptance and forgiveness through the One who is enough. The only One who lived a perfect life and showed us how we should live. But since we could never be that, He made a way for us in His blood.

In a small way, this is what Aaron does for his people. He prays for them and becomes an occasion for a divine miracle of resurrection. But in all this holiness, what Aaron lacks is the grace that God alone could show. In Christ's resurrection, we don't just see a display of power, though it was the highest display of power this world has seen since its creation. But instead an act of love.

It is when we understand this truth that we can find rest, not in the power of God, but in the love of God, and we can seek to emulate this in our own lives. Whatever power God has entrusted us with, to see it as a means to love others and care for them. Like Moses and Aaron, this doesn't mean we can't condemn the wickedness of others, and even pray against those who practice evil, but in all things, that we are motivated, not by wrath or envy, but genuine love for others.

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

-1 John 3:16