

Numbers Chapter 16 – John Karmelich

1. For people who have familiarity with the bible, we now come to a fairly famous story about a rebellion amongst the Israelites against Moses. Many bibles call this chapter "Korah's Rebellion" or something similar to that. To summarize the entire chapter in a few thoughts, some Levites along with some members of one of the other tribes (the tribe of Reuben), questioned whether or not Moses should be the leader. The short version of this chapter is God intervenes and destroys those who joined in this rebellion and Moses remained the leader. By the end of this chapter, about 15,000 people will be dead due to this rebellion.
 - a) OK, John so 15,000 people died well over 3,000 years ago. Why should I care? The issue is not to learn about history, but how we apply history to our lives. With that said, let me give my lesson title, "God and Power". I admit that of all the issues I write about in these lessons, I rarely talk about the issue of power and envy over those who are placed in a position of power. We are way overdue on this topic, and that is the focus of this lesson.
 - b) Let start by asking some questions: When is it appropriate for us to question who is in the leadership, say of our church or our government? As Christians, do we have a right to ever challenge who is in charge? How do we know if someone is a God appointed leader or not? If we challenge the leadership of say, our church, could we be struck dead like the people named in this chapter? Hopefully, through this lesson, I can take on some of those questions and ease our minds a little how God looks at these types of issues.
 - c) In my life as a Christian, I have been involved in a handful of churches and have seen a number of different models of how churches operate. I've seen "dictatorship" models of churches and I've seen elders who run churches far more than the pastors. For what it is worth, I've come to the conclusion that churches that don't make tough decisions unless there is complete agreement amongst the elders and pastors is the best model. To put it another way, I've known church elders who have said, "We had tough decisions to make, we made them and then we moved on." I think if one keeps that model in mind, and seek God's guidance through any leadership problem, that will eventually solve one's issues.
2. All of that leads me back to Moses and this rebellion. What impressed me about Moses was that the first thing he did when facing this rebellion was turn the situation over to God. Moses said in effect to God, "I don't know what to do here. This group wants to kill me and they don't want to keep me as their leader. If You (God) want me to stay in this leadership position, then guide me as to what to do about this challenge to my leadership."
 - a) Again, the short version here is God struck dead those who rebelled. That does not mean that if we have a legitimate complaint against our church leadership or our government leaders, we should not take proper steps to deal with it. The issue is always about seeking His will about the issue of power. This is God saying to us in effect, that He cares about every aspect of our lives and that includes that of leadership. Like my friend who was an elder at my former church said, "You seek God, make the tough decisions, and move on."
 - b) As best I can tell, the problem with these people who revolted against Moses is not that they questioned his leadership or his decisions, but that they didn't seek God's will.
 - c) If I saw Moses do all of those miracles, I would accept that God has picked him to be in charge and live with that. I may not like every decision those over me have made for me, but I have to accept that this is my leaders are there whether I like or it not and as Paul said, "Pray for those in power so we may have peaceful lives." (Based on 1st Timothy 2.2.)
 - i) Yes, but John, you don't know my leaders. How do I know if they are seeking His will every day? That is why the Old and New Testament clearly state we should pray for our leaders. That includes the ones we like and don't like. If they are there, we ask that God guide their decisions so we may live peaceful lives.

3. Suppose I am not in any sort of leadership role nor do I want to be any sort of leader. Then just remember that the bible teaches us to pray for those who are leaders over us. Also remember one of the main things about the book of Numbers: It teaches how God wants us to be organized in order to make that difference for Him. One of the issues in going through our own wilderness experience is about how we organize through such times and that includes leadership issues.
 - a) Let me explain this concept one more way: God never wants our relationship with Him to be just "Him and us". Through the bible, He encourages group effort and interaction with other believers. Consider the special talents that God has given us. How does one use those things unless one is involved with other believers or potential believers? Our own relationship with God should involve working with other people. If we are involved with other people, then leadership issues are going to arise at times. If one has doubt about the leadership structure that one is involved with, one needs to bring that issue to God in prayer and let Him guide us as to how to deal with that issue.
 - b) Since much of what we have read so far in Numbers deals with the issue of organization, a natural question arises here about questioning leadership. Remember that the Israelites just found out they have to wander through the wilderness for roughly the next 40 years. It would be a natural question to pose to one's leaders, are you sure about this?
4. The final question to consider is, "What if I am not going through any sort of wilderness type of experience at the moment or what if I am happy with the leadership position of the groups that I am involved with at the moment? Other than voting in elections, why should I care about any of this stuff in this chapter? Why should I care that God verified Moses to be the leader?"
 - a) I would answer that series of questions with, "If you are not dealing with a wilderness problem now, or a leadership problem now, the odds are pretty good that if one lives a long life, one will have to deal with something like this in the future." My point is simply that if one takes the time to learn about how God wants us to be organized and what He has to teach us about leadership, it will save us a lot of future grief if we can all learn how He wants us to deal with leadership issues.
 - b) With that preachy comment stated, ☺ it is time to actually start the text of this lesson.
5. Verse 1: Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites--Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth--became insolent ² and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. ³ They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?"
 - a) To start, we get introduced to the "players" in this rebellion. If one wants to sum up the key points about these people, they will all be struck dead before the chapter is over.
 - b) With that tough thought in mind, let me give a little background to each of these people.
 - i) The first person listed is a man named Korah. He was not a priest, but he was a Levite. That group was assigned to assist the priests in their duty.
 - ii) In the bible, most people don't have last names. One's full name is often in effect, "Joe, son of Bob, a descendant of this tribe".
 - iii) The point is the family of Korah was part of the group of Levites that camped on the south side of the tabernacle structure. To recall some facts from one of the early lessons on Numbers, this group was in charge of transporting all of the furnishings inside the tabernacle structure.
 - a) My point is these men already had some power amongst all the Israelites. They were in charge of carrying all the furnishings on their shoulders.
 - c) So if these Levites were already separated for God's use and already had some power within this community, why did they want more power? Yes I could give a lecture about how power craves more power and absolute power corrupts absolutely. I think the point is these guys wanted to take over Moses' leadership role over all of the Israelites.

- d) If you recall, all of the Israelites found out fairly recently that they were not going to enter the Promised Land. Only their children would be allowed to enter. I have to admit that if I heard that news, I would question Moses' leadership as well. These 250 men (Verse 2) amongst the Israelites were saying to Moses in effect, all of us have been separated by God to serve Him. All of us have seen the great miracles He has done and have followed Him to this point. We are not questioning His existence, just His will for our lives. We don't believe God has just called you, Moses to lead us. We can do it better ourselves.
- i) If you think about this rebellion, it took some planning. It involved some of the leading men from amongst all the Israelites. The leaders of this rebellion included some of the Levites (the tribe of priests) and some of the tribe of Reuben.
 - ii) So why was members of the tribe of Reuben here? Most likely, it is because of the 12 sons that started the 12 tribes of Israel, Reuben was the firstborn. Therefore, in the minds of these Reubenites, they should be the natural leaders, as after all they were the descendants of the first born son amongst the 12 tribes.
 - iii) Sometimes, the reasons for a rebellion appear to be good ones. It would be logical to ask whether or not we should have to wander for 40 years in this wilderness. It would be logical to ask, how come you are the leader and not me? After all, I was "born first", or "I am the smartest" or whatever reason one wants to give.
 - iv) The issue is not the logic of questions but what is God's will for our lives.
 - a) For those Israelites, God's will was for Moses to lead them. After all, he was raised in the household of the Pharaoh of Egypt and he would know a few things about leadership. Moses is the one that God speaks to about guiding them. God used the skills Moses had to lead a very large group.
 - b) What this group of 250 men didn't do is seek God's will for their lives. We read of them approaching Moses. We read of them questioning whether or not Moses was called to leadership. We read of them questioning whether or not they should wander in the wilderness. These are all good questions. What they failed to do is seek God's will and say, "What do you want for all of our individual lives here?"
- e) Jesus Himself spoke on the issue of power. One example is when he taught that when one is invited to a wedding feast, choose a seat in the back and if then one is called to go up front, then and only then go up front. (See Luke 14:8-10). The point is if we are to be raised up in leadership, ultimately that is not our decision, but God's Himself.
- i) So how do we know whether or not we should lead unless we try? To put it another way, is it ok for me to seek leadership? To state the obvious, the men in this chapter sought it and were killed for doing so. So when do I make the effort to try to lead if it could get me killed? The obvious answer is to start by praying about a situation and see if it is God's will. Another sign of leadership in any capacity is to see if people are following what you or I do.
 - ii) The way I describe any "calling" by God, is one cannot stand not to do it. I write because I can't stand not writing about the bible. It drives me to do so, no matter what else is going on in my life. Lots of people feel called by God to run for offices in everything from churches to government. Just remember that to be called to run for something and actually holding that position are two different things.
 - iii) I know of pastors that when they encounter a person who wants to go in that same profession, they discourage them and try to talk them out of it. To quote Alistair Begg, "If you can do anything else besides a pastoral ministry, do it. If you can't stand the idea of doing anything else, then you are being called by God". These pastors are simply trying to make sure that those people are truly being called by Him into that leadership role. Meanwhile, now that we know how to be called by God into leadership, let us read about these men who questioned Moses' role.

6. Verse 4: When Moses heard this, he fell facedown. ⁵ Then he said to Korah and all his followers: "In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him. ⁶ You, Korah, and all your followers are to do this: Take censers ⁷ and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before the LORD. The man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!"
- a) Notice that when this crowd approached Moses, the first thing he did was fall facedown. This is not a reaction of fear, but of seeking God's will for his life. To paraphrase how Moses prayed, "Dear God, I am in a desperate situation here. Some leading men amongst the roughly two million people out here want to kill me. I don't know what to do here, so I am desperately seeking Your help. Guide me here."
 - i) I suspect that is what Moses thought all of that in a brief moment of time. Then he probably realized that God is in charge, and not himself nor these other men.
 - ii) What Moses did in these verses in effect, is turn over the whole leadership issue to God to say in effect, "You decide who should be the leader." Moses was giving the Israelites a test to say, "Let us all see together who God is picking."
 - iii) Notice that these men went along with this plan. The idea is that all 250 of them plus Moses will approach God together and equally and see what happens.
 - b) One thing I wondered is, how did they have 250 "censures" ready in one day? What I suspect is that they each had lamps near their tents to see at night. Moses is saying to them, "Take a burning light that you have as we camp and add some incense (something that smells nice when it burns)." My point is the physical effort to organize what was needed to present 250 censures was something that was possible to do in one night.
 - c) The final thing we read about is Moses cursing them out. He said in effect, "You fellow Levites (Moses was also a Levite), you don't appreciate the role that God has already laid out for your lives, but now you want more power than what He has already given you." That fact alone should tell you what Moses thought of them questioning his leadership.
 - d) You may find it interesting that the ringleader amongst the Levites was actually a first cousin of Moses. If one traces the names of Korah's family, it is of the same line as Moses family and that makes them cousins. This is Moses speaking to a person he has probably known his whole life and saying, "Cousin, this is wrong what you are trying to do here."
 - i) For the references to the cousins, compare Verse 1 with Numbers 26: 58-59.
 - ii) Meanwhile, Moses is just getting warmed up cursing out this group. ☺
7. Verse 8: Moses also said to Korah, "Now listen, you Levites! ⁹ Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the LORD's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? ¹⁰ He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. ¹¹ It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"
- a) To understand these verses, the first thing we have to remember is the phrase, "Not all Levites were priests, but all priests were Levites". All of the direct descendants of Aaron were called to be the priests and the rest of the Levites were called by God to assist the priests. This group leading the rebellion were Levites, but not priests. This is a "power play", pure and simple. This group was not happy with the power that was already given to them by God and they wanted more power for themselves.
 - b) Remember that if Korah and Moses are cousins, so are Korah and Aaron, as Aaron is the brother of Moses. Moses is saying to his cousin, "Korah, God decided that your cousin Aaron and his sons should be the priests and not you." Moses is not saying to go take this complaint to Aaron, but that it was wrong of them to seek more power than God has given them in the first place. Moses then goes on to say in effect, "You (Korah) are not rebelling against me or my brother, but against God's will for all of our lives".
 - c) Now Moses is going to chew out the Reubenites next, who are also part of this rebellion.

8. Verse 12: Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab. But they said, "We will not come!" ¹³ Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? ¹⁴ Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!"
- a) The short version here is Moses is no longer chewing out the leaders of the tribe of Levites and has now moved on to wanting to single out other two ringleaders of this rebellion. That is, two elders from the tribe of Reuben.
 - b) Some people might wonder, how did these two guys scheme with some of the Levites anyway? I thought everybody camped within their tribes. The answer is that if one looks at where the Reubenites camped, it was on the south side of the tabernacle right next to the Levites who were involved in the rebellion. My point is that all of those involved in complaining against Moses lived near each other at this time.
 - c) I also see the humor in the rebel's statement. They got word to Moses, that you (Moses) got us out of a land flowing with milk and honey (i.e., Egypt) and have not brought us into a land of milk and honey (Israel) nor do we have any good fields for our flocks. The bottom line is that they were so angry with Moses they wouldn't even come to see him.
 - i) The funny part is they referred to their old home in Egypt as a "land flowing with milk and honey". No reference to slavery for the last 400 years. One does not read about these men complaining when the plagues were happening upon Egypt. Remember that these two men also personally witnessed those plagues.
 - ii) The complaint in effect is, "God could have just killed all the Egyptians that ruled over us and given us that good land back there. Now, we are sentenced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until we all die off and no one will receive a good land." On the surface, their complaints appear to have merit.
 - d) The issue comes down to the age-old question, "Why did God work this way in our lives instead of working the way we want Him to work?" That is in effect what these men were grumbling about. The great sin of course, is to not accept His will for one's life. God's will for that generation was to go conquer the land despite the bad report of the spies. Since the Israelites refused to trust in God, they were sentenced to die out there.
 - i) Now these men instead of blaming themselves decided it was Moses' fault for bad leadership. This whole section is another reminder that the purpose of our lives is to live out God's will and not our own will for our lives. God never promises that life will be easy. He only promises that He will see us through our own times of our own wilderness experience in order to help us draw closer to Him.
 - e) The bottom line is that these men were feeling sorry for themselves at how their lives were turning out for the moment. Instead of crying out to God for help, they decided it was the fault of Moses and they refused to even see him over this issue.
 - f) In the next verse, we get Moses' response to how these men acted against him.
9. Verse 15: Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them."
- a) Something to consider here, is how did Moses financially support himself at this time? The answer is that when all of the Israelites were required to give a tenth of what they owned to the priests, Moses indirectly benefited from that, as he was part of that tribe. When animals were offered to the priestly tribe, part of that worked its way up the ladder to Moses. My point is simply that Moses never demanded extra payment for himself. The issue of giving to the Levites is a topic coming up in Chapter 18.
 - i) The point is when Moses said in these verses, that I have never taken anything from these men, the point is he never went over and above what God ordained.
 - ii) Moses couldn't fix the anger of these men. All he could do is pour out his anger over the accusations to God. How God responds is coming up in latter verses.

10. Verse 16: Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow--you and they and Aaron. ¹⁷ Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it--250 censers in all--and present it before the LORD. You and Aaron are to present your censers also." ¹⁸So each man took his censer, put fire and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁹ When Korah had gathered all his followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the glory of the LORD appeared to the entire assembly.
- a) Here, Moses did take care of what he could control and let go to God of things that were beyond his control. For example, Korah, who was the Levite leading the rebellion of the 250 men did confront Moses. The leaders of the tribe of Reuben ignored him. This is the basis of an expression my wife taught me, "Dear God, help me to deal with what I can deal with and let go of the things I cannot". Moses could deal with the men of the Korah rebellion because they did confront him. Moses had to let go of the rebellion of the men of Reuben because they refused to actually confront him and just grumbled at their tents.
 - b) With that said, let us look at how Moses did deal with the 250 men who rebelled against his leadership lead by this man named Korah.
 - i) Notice what Moses didn't do or say: He didn't say, "Hey, God put me in charge, now go and deal with it." Moses didn't say, "God used me to put the plagues on Egypt and used me to part the Red Sea, so go think about that for a while."
 - ii) Moses did say, "You want to see who God is going to make the leader? Great. Let each one of you take his censer (picture a small bowl to carry a light so they could see in the dark). In that censer put fire (i.e., a burning lamp) and add some incense so that it smelled good and let's see what God says about the leadership."
 - iii) So does that mean that every time someone questions our leadership, we need to stop and design some sort of test? What this incident shows is that if one designs this type of test once, others will get the idea of who God calls to leadership.
 - iv) Another way of confronting rebellion is just to say, "let us bring this issue up to God and then see how those who follow us react to this".
 - v) Many years ago, when my father was president of a small bank I remember a day when the vice president tried to get the board of directors to replace him as the leader. At the end of the day the vice president was fired along with others who joined in his rebellion. I was in college and worked for my father at that time.
 - a) What I recall years later is that my father forgave him and said in effect, "That type of challenge is part of the business world, and I don't take it personally". The two men actually remained friends even after the vice president was fired and got another job somewhere else. In fact, one of my clients a few years later was that same vice president at his next job.
 - b) The point is just as my father let the results go to those in charge (the board of directors), so we have to let go of such challenges and trust that God will somehow work it out for His glory. Could my father have lost his job that day? Of course he could. I watched my father let go of the situation and trust that the right thing would be done. After that, no one ever challenged my father's leadership as being in charge of that bank.
 - c) All of this talk about my father does lead me back to Moses. In effect, what Moses did was say, "Hey God, this rebellion is too big for me to handle. Besides there are 250 of "them" and only one of "me". Therefore, if it is your will, God, You make it so that it is still my job to be their leader. If You want someone else God, that is your business too."
 - i) That is why Moses said to these 250 men, separate yourself from the rest of the congregation and bring your offerings to God. Let all us see who God accepts the offering from and whom God rejects. In other words, this is not my problem to solve, but His, therefore, let us find out together what is His will at the moment.

11. Verse 20: The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ²¹ "Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."
 - a) In Verse 20, we get God's response to Moses request. Notice the first thing that God does is deal with Moses himself as opposed to dealing with the leaders of this rebellion.
 - b) God says, "Let Me kill off everyone and put an end to this rebellion".
 - i) So does that mean it was God's intention to actually kill the entire group? I would argue that God's intention here was just to test Moses and see how he would react to that statement. This is another example of how God tests us daily. This is God also saying in effect, "You don't want to deal with this rebellion? Great, I'll just make you happy and kill off all of the Israelites. Will that satisfy you Moses?"
 - ii) Of course Moses didn't want that, he just wanted God to deal with the rebellion itself. Before God could deal with the specific rebellion, He wanted to test Moses to make sure he was still up for being the leader of this group. This is how God teaches us, "I (God) called you (Moses) many years ago for this role. I know what I am doing and I know why I picked you to be the leader. Now deal with it." ☺
 - iii) OK, that may be fine and well for Moses, but how do I know whether or not God has called me to do what I believe He wants me to do? The answer to take a step in faith and see the results. God's three standard answers to prayer are "Yes, no and not yet". Often we simply just have to go try and see the results. When we take that step in faith, we find out soon enough what is His will for that moment.
12. Verse 22: But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and cried out, "O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?"
 - a) There is a classical joke in both Judaism and Christianity in effect that Moses had a flat nose as he was constantly falling on his face before God. That does not mean that God wants us to pray in that same way. It just means that Moses was serious when he said to God, "I accept Your will for my life and I don't want to wipe out everyone, but I do want You to punish who is guilty and I'll leave it up to You to decide how to punish them."
13. Verse 23: Then the LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ "Say to the assembly, 'Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.' "
 - a) At this point God is telling Moses, to get word out to the entire assembly to not go near the tents of the three ring leaders: Korah, who was the Levite and Dathan and Abiram who were from the tribe of Reuben. Moses did not know what God was going to do with those three leaders at this point, but Moses knew enough about God to say in effect, "He is going to do something about these three men and quit frankly, I don't want to be in the same neighborhood when that happens", to put it mildly. ☺
14. Verse 25: Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶He warned the assembly, "Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins." ²⁷ So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents.
 - a) Notice that Moses referred to the rebellion as sin at the end of Verse 26. The sin was not to question Moses' skill as the leader, but to not accept God's will for their lives. Again, Moses didn't know specifically what God was going to do to these men, but knowing that God has zero tolerance for sin, Moses got word out to get away from these people.
 - b) So does that mean if a pastor puts a curse on me, I am doomed? I have watched a few Christian leaders put curses on others who disagree with their ministries and in effect nothing happened to those critics. God is big enough to deal with each of us His own way on His own timing and we don't have to fear when others put us down.
 - i) With that said, Moses was definitely "God ordained". Moses was not giving this order to show how great of a leader He was, but to get people to trust in how God works. Moses is saying, "let us all see how God handles this power play here."

- c) Remember that while Korah did confront Moses directly, these other two men did not. Try to imagine if you were these three men at this point. You are standing at the entrance to your tents, and you see everyone else running away from you. I would be thinking, "What did I do that everyone is running away from me? And where should I go?"
 - i) The text specifically mentions that these men were standing in front of their tents with their wives and children. It is almost as if these rebels were hiding behind their families and thinking, "Is God going to wipe out these innocent people (my family) just because I questioned whether or not Moses should be the leader?"
 - ii) Let me come back to the story of the vice president of the bank my father worked for. Did his wife and children have to suffer because that man lost his job at that point in his life? Of course they did. In life, the innocent have to suffer due to the results of those in charge of their lives. In the many years since that event took place, I have never seen the family of that man and because my father forgave them, there was never any revenge by that family against anyone.
 - iii) This leads me back to this family that was part of this rebellion. Did they have to suffer due to the actions of their leader? Of course. Will God judge each member of that family fairly in the end? I trust that He does. As I like to say, if this life is all that there is, life is very unfair. If there is a next life, that is the only way to deal with much of the cruelty and evil that exists in this lifetime.
 - a) In the meantime, it is time for us to see how God through Moses deals with these men who rebelled against his leadership.
- 15. Verse 28: Then Moses said, "This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: ²⁹ If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the LORD has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt."
 - a) The first thing that occurred to me as I read these verses is that Moses was bold to predict what God was going to do with these men. I don't know if Moses had any special insight that these men would die suddenly, or if he was just shooting off his mouth. It is also conceivable that he wrote this section in hindsight and he was just stating the facts of what happened that day.
 - b) What is important is the phrase "not my idea" at the end of Verse 28. This is Moses stating that he was never crazy about the idea of being the leader of the Israelites. Moses came to realize over time that this leadership role was God's plan for his life. That's something to keep in mind when life gets difficult: Life should never be about our will for our lives, but His. If it is His desire for us to be some sort of leader or "fill in the blank", then we must accept His will for us for our lives.
 - i) OK, God may know my life plan but I don't. What do I do? To give my favorite bit of career planning advice, "Do what one enjoys doing, or do what one cannot stand not doing. If one cannot do that now, work toward that goal." I've met way too many people who focus way too hard on trying to achieve money or power and ignore what they simply can't stand not doing.
 - ii) That is the beauty of the famous statement in the book of James that says in effect, "If it God's will, we will do this or that". (Based on James 4:15.) The point is we are to seek His will for our lives, and then do what we can to make a difference for Him by doing what "we can't stand not doing" as I say over and over again.
 - c) Meanwhile, I left Moses cursing out those who questioned God's will for Moses life. To put it simply, it became obvious over time that God has ordained Moses to be the leader. Because these three men refused to see what has become obviously true over time, they will suffer for not seeking what is blatant. How they suffer is in the next set of verses.

16. Verse 31: As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. ³³ They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. ³⁴ At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, "The earth is going to swallow us too!"
- a) First I want to say I've read some interesting articles on how this physically happened. There are some conjectures about when the Israelites are camping out in the middle of the wilderness. When water flows underground in such places, it can cause sand to sink and swallow people up quickly around them. I don't know for sure if that is actually how this happened. If "God is God", well, He can allow or cause the earth to be used how He wants it to be used. Therefore, whether it was an earthquake or the act of sand shifting, if God wanted the earth to swallow them up, He can make it so.
 - b) The point here is these men were questioning the obvious that God has made Moses the leader. God was getting His message across that what He ordains is what He ordains and we should accept His will as oppose to try to fight it like these men did.
 - c) The text says that all of their households perished along with all of their men. Yet later in the book we will read of the sons of Korah did not die (Numbers 26:11). Apparently those who died in this rebellion included the servants of Korah but not all of his family.
 - i) Still, these families lost all of their possessions and Korah himself. The point being made here is that on one hand, "God does not punish the children for the sins of their parents" (See Ezekiel 18:20), but at the same time, like life itself, children often have to suffer for the misdeeds of their parents and we see that happening here. (See Exodus 20:5 on that principal.)
 - d) The bigger question of course, is does God still do this today? First, remember that the New Testament teaches that all things written before hand (that is the Old Testament) was written for our learning. That is my paraphrase of Romans 15:4. Therefore, as opposed to God wiping out everyone who ever disobeyed Him, He effectively says to us, "Study the bible as to how we should live and understand there are consequences for disobedience."
 - i) To put it another way, I wouldn't want to test God by being disobedient to any thing that appears to be obviously His will for my life.
 - ii) Does that mean, for example, no one should run against a sitting president for office in the United States? Of course not. God may have told every candidate it was His will for them to run, but only He knows what is His will to actually win.
 - iii) What about just questioning a leadership decision at our church? Almost all churches have methods of bringing up issues made by the leaders and if we have a good case that the decision made by our leaders is not biblical, there is never a problem of bringing up that decision. Also, one usually has the option of walking away if one believes the decisions are not biblically based. To repeat a quote I gave on page one of this lesson, my elder friend said, "We had tough decisions to make, we made them, and then we moved on." To elaborate, that group prays together for God's will to be done, and then they deal with the business at hand.
 - e) Meanwhile, we left Korah and his gang being swallowed up by the earth. In a literal sense, the ground gave way under them, and then they literally went down in the earth.
 - i) So are those people still eternally saved? Don't know. I just know God is teaching us that there are consequences to be suffered when we choose what becomes to us as to our will for our lives both as individuals and collectively.
 - f) Finally, notice that in Verse 34 that the rest of the Israelites got a clue. It appears that this act caused a panic where others were saying, "We will get swallowed up by the earth too, if we don't accept Moses as our leader." The life lesson here is when we ignore what is obviously His will for our lives, it can cost us our lives, or the lives of some around us. God got His point across by using these men as examples for us to learn about trust.

17. Verse 35: And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.
 - a) Meanwhile, there were 250 men in total who were part of this organized rebellion. These were the men who brought a "firepot" (again, probably a small pan with fire inside mixed with incense) to God. However, they were doing this in the hopes that Korah would take over Moses' leadership role and then somehow, they would share in this power.
 - i) I suspect that these 250 men were not the same men who have been appointed leaders of the twelve tribes as listed in earlier chapters in Numbers. This chapter lists these 250 as prominent men, but I suspect that like Korah, they wanted their share of power, and they too had been past for leadership roles.
 - b) I make that statement because this verse says that God wiped them out. Instead of the earth swallowing them up like Korah and his associates, "fire came from God" and as I like to put it, God zapped them on the spot.
 - i) God had already ordained that only the priest (Aaron) and his sons are allowed to offer incense to Him. (See Leviticus 2:2 as an example.) It was a violation of God's laws for these men to offer up incense and God is making that clear here.
 - c) So why this method of execution? Why weren't they swallowed up in the earth like the rest of the people in this conspiracy? The answer is, "You wanted to offer fire, let me give you fire in response to doing what I only called Aaron to do." This is God making the statement, "I have picked who I have picked and the rest of you have to accept it".
 - i) So does this mean I will be "fired" by God if I question the leadership? If that were true, none of us would live very long. The best way to see God's will be done is to look in hindsight as to what is happening. If something is blatant like Moses and the specified leaders of the twelve tribes who were picked, one has to accept it.
 - d) Again, the issue has nothing to do with voting in elections or even stating one's opinion about a leadership issue in a manner that is appropriate. The issue is about accepting God's will for leadership at that moment whether one approves of that leader or not.
18. Verse 36: The LORD said to Moses, ³⁷ "Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to take the censers out of the smoldering remains and scatter the coals some distance away, for the censers are holy--³⁸ the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives. Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the LORD and have become holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites."
 - a) I find these verses present a great visual picture. Imagine if 250 people were just killed by a fire coming out of the sky and literally struck them dead. Now one of Aaron's sons is told, go walk in the middle of that fire scene, avoid the dead bodies, and grab the fire pots in the middle of that section. That would scare me to death if I had to do that service right after all of that death occurred.
 - i) This is a good example of trusting in one's appointed leader. The leader just said, "Go do this" and we read of nothing negative happening to Eleazar for doing this.
 - b) Back to the "why" issue: These 250 firepots were offered to God, and by definition, that makes them holy. The idea of "holy" just means something separated for God's use. This priest had to get rid of the coals inside the firepots as those coals represented the fire they wrongly offered, but the firepots themselves are "holy" and now belong to God.
 - c) To explain this idea another way, God wanted to make a visual point that we don't mess with Him. By having those metal firepots beaten and combined into a single covering for the altar in the tabernacle, it sends a message that He is not to be messed with.
 - d) So why was Aaron's son in charge of doing this? Because only the head priest and his sons were allowed to use the "pit" for the animal sacrifices. So why Aaron's son and not Aaron himself? I don't know. Maybe his son was better at working with metal. More likely, it is so Aaron could continue his daily job of being the high priest while his son could work on collecting and beating this metal together in one piece.

19. Verse 39: So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers brought by those who had been burned up, and he had them hammered out to overlay the altar,⁴⁰ as the LORD directed him through Moses. This was to remind the Israelites that no one except a descendant of Aaron should come to burn incense before the LORD, or he would become like Korah and his followers.
 - a) In case one misses the point from the earlier verses, these two verses one again make the point that Eleazar took the 250 censers and made them into a covering for the altar.
 - b) It is not blatantly stated in this text, but it seems pretty obvious that it refers to the altar where the animals were sacrificed. The only other altar there was the prayer altar and that altar was much smaller than the "barbeque pit". My point is the metal from 250 firepots is probably about right to use as a cover over the altar used to burn the animals.
 - c) Verse 40 makes a very similar point to Verse 38 that this act was done to make the point that no one except for Aaron and his sons were allowed to offer up incense to God.
 - i) To state it another way, God was driving the point home that whom He chooses as the leaders, are the leaders, and we have to accept that decision.
 - ii) Again, that doesn't mean we can't vote when we are allowed to. We can still bring up questions about leadership in an appropriate manner or setting. However, when something becomes obvious as to His will, we must accept that fact. The scary point is when we refuse to accept what is obviously God's will, we too can suffer even with our lives for questioning what is His will for our lives.
 - iii) As I also like to say, "One is in eternal trouble when one doesn't study one's bible. The problem is once we do know what it says, He holds us accountable for it."
 - iv) Meanwhile, we still have 10 more verses and one more rebellion to go.
20. Verse 41: The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the LORD's people," they said.
 - a) If you recall, I said in the beginning of the chapter that about 15,000 people die here. Well, so far we've had less than 300 die. That is the 250 who offered their "firepots" plus those who were part of Korah's family and servants. In other words, we have a lot more killing to deal with before we can wrap up this chapter.
 - b) One would think that if one just witnessed the death of these people, they wouldn't want to question Moses' leadership. Instead of the congregation blaming the sins of those who took part in the rebellion, they blamed Moses and Aaron. The complain was in effect, "How do you know God gave us all of these laws to obey? Why should we take your word for it? You, Moses allowed them to die, based on your command decisions."
 - i) The good news here is that God has had enough of complaining and is about to make an example to teach them and us, not only who is in charge, but to grasp the idea that His word is true and that what Moses is teaching is His will.
21. Verse 42: But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared.⁴³ Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tent of Meeting,⁴⁴ and the LORD said to Moses,⁴⁵ "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once." And they fell facedown.
 - a) To paraphrase, God is telling Moses and Aaron, "I've had enough of all of this rebellion. Get away from the whole congregation and I'll kill them all." After understanding what God has said, once again Moses worked on "flattening his nose" and fell facedown.
 - b) Was it really God's intention to kill all of the Israelites? Again, I would argue no, simply based on the fact that all of them did not die. This is another test to Moses to ask him in effect, "Are you going to be their leader or not? Even now, when things are getting very difficult, are you going to lead them and accept My (God's) decisions for their lives?"
 - c) OK John, that may be fine and well for Moses. However, when I have my own issues as either a leader or with my leaders, I don't get a physical cloud to show God's presence. Think of the cloud as the situation being "fuzzy" based on our problems. The point is we seek Him in order to deal with whatever it is we have to deal with at that moment.

22. Verse 46: Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started." ⁴⁷ So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. ⁴⁸ He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. ⁴⁹ But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. ⁵⁰ Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for the plague had stopped.
- a) I don't know how this plague actually happened. Were people just instantly getting sick and falling over dead, or was it an issue of people getting really sick really fast and then dying like some sort of "black plague"? However, this actual plague happened, Moses and Aaron understood that this was God ordained. In order to bring this plague to an end, Moses commanded Aaron go offer incense to God on their behalf.
 - i) Think about how strange that would be today. If we started to see a plague we would look to our doctors to find a cure that people could take to end that plague. Yes we would pray for it to end, but we would never think that the solution to end this plague would only come from prayer.
 - b) Let me put this in context. The last few days, I have had a number of little things start to go wrong in my life. This was more than just the usual bad moments and I realized that I needed to specifically seek God's help on this issue. I have a very close friend and we are in the daily habit of praying together for each other and our families. He told me of all sorts of little things that he was having problems with as well. What was amazing to see is how many of our problems in both our lives just got better after we prayed.
 - i) That does not guarantee God will always work our way and on our timing. It just is an example that He does answer prayer, no matter the size of the request.
 - ii) Think of it another way, what's the harm in praying about a bad situation?
 - c) Meanwhile, instead of telling how my life is getting better, the Israelites are in big trouble.
 - i) Remember that Moses and Aaron were in their 80's at this point in their life. Now picture Aaron trying to run as fast as he can to get to the tabernacle to offer up incense in order to stop a plague from spreading. By the time Aaron had done this act, the body count was at 14,700 people who had died. How did they know the number? I suspect they were piling up the dead bodies somewhere.
 - ii) The point is, like my own life this week, the prayer worked.
 - d) OK John, so Aaron prayed and there was no more death. Assuming this story is accurate as it was written (and I believe it is), what does it have to do with my life today?
 - i) If nothing else, we see this whole section as a model of the danger of messing with God's will for our lives. We see the effects of a lack of trust spreading the same way a disease can spread or the effects of sin can spread. I am not saying that if a plague happened today that doctors shouldn't do what they can to bring such a plague to an end. I am saying that we should never fail to seek God to intercede.
 - ii) Think of it this way: God could have said, "Hey, they want to rebel? Now watch Me (God) kill them all for this rebellion." Instead one man made the effort to pray for the whole congregation, and the plague came to and end. That means for us when we see things growing out of control, the first thing we need to do is to bring the issue to God and trust in His mercy and forgiveness on behalf of the group. If that doesn't inspire us to get our knees, nothing will. Speaking of which:
23. Heavenly Father, we ask that You forgive us for not trusting in You. We can't stop all the effects of sin in this world, but we can seek Your guidance. Like Aaron, help us to "stand in the gap" and pray for those who are hurting as we can make a difference by seeking You. Help us to deal with issues of power, leadership and envy based on Your word and not self seeking desires. Help us to remember that we are Your servants and not the other way around. Help us to use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.