



LESSON 34

Israel rejects God's prophet and priest

NUMBERS 16:1-17:11



We must worship God His way.



“And he said to Korah and all his company, “In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him.” (Num 16:5).

Supporting Truths

1. God hates false worship.
2. God has prescribed how man ought to approach Him.
3. Rejecting God’s Word is rebellion against Him.
4. God punishes those who rebel against Him.
5. God is merciful in His judgment.

Objectives

1. Name the sin of Korah.
2. Describe what Korah’s role in the tabernacle was.
3. Explain how Korah overstepped the limits God had established for his service in the tabernacle.
4. Describe God’s punishment of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the 250 leaders.
5. Describe how God revealed his mercy in the midst of his judgment.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

Israel rejects God's prophet and priest • Numbers 16:1–17:11



Lesson Summary

Korah led a massive rebellion against Moses and Aaron because he wanted to be priest. But God defended Moses and Aaron, demonstrating His choice of Aaron by judging the rebels, accepting Aaron's prayers on behalf of the people, and sending a divine sign vindicating Aaron as His choice for priest. Through all this, God demonstrated that He is serious about worship. Man can only approach God in the way that He has prescribed, which is through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Spotlight on the Gospel

In Numbers 16:1–17:11, God defended Aaron's authority to serve as high priest. Today, the only high priest is Jesus, who continues as high priest forever (Heb 7:24). He was appointed by God (5:5–7), and functions as the perfect high priest who offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin once for all (7:27). Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), and He alone is able to save all those who draw near to God through Him (Heb 7:25).

LAST WEEK



Israel rejects God's plan
Numbers 13:1–14:45

THIS WEEK



Israel rejects God's prophet and priest
Numbers 16:1–17:11

NEXT WEEK



God offers Israel healing from sin
Numbers 20:2–13; 21:4–9

REBELLION

Lesson Commentary

We must worship God His way.

The nation of Israel continually rejected the LORD. They rebelled against the LORD by grumbling against His goodness (11:1–3), by complaining about His provision (11:4–35), by challenging Moses’s leadership (12:1–16), and by rejecting His promises (13:1–14:45). Their constant rejection demonstrated their sin and revealed their need for a mediator, someone to represent them before a holy God and to make peace with God concerning their sin. But the people rejected the LORD’s mediator, Aaron and his family, insisting that any Israelite could serve as priest. Therefore, the LORD confirmed the priesthood of Aaron, as well as Moses’ right to lead the people once and for all.

Korah and many others questioned the leadership of Moses and Aaron (16:1–40)

Korah challenged Aaron and his family’s God given right to serve as priests (16:3). Korah claimed that all of Israel was holy, set apart and separate from sin, and therefore the entire nation should be allowed to be priests (cf. Exod 19:6). Korah himself was a Levite, but he was not a priest; rather, he was a Kohathite. The Kohathites were Levites who were instructed to carry the holy objects used in the tent of meeting when the Israelite camp was on the move (Num 4:1–20), but they were not to touch the holy things or even look at them, lest they die (4:15, 20). Korah had been given a very important job, but he was jealous of his cousins who had been made priests by the LORD. Korah accused Aaron of having acted selfishly by keeping the priesthood to himself, but in reality it was Korah who was disobeying God’s law (16: 3, 7).



THINK ABOUT IT

All sin is ultimately rebellion against God and a rejection of His Word.

Dathan, Abiram, and On, who were Reubenites, also joined Korah in his rebellion against God’s appointed leaders. They too were attempting to gain authority they thought was rightfully theirs (cf. Gen 49:3–4). They accused Moses

of putting out the eyes of the men, an idiom similar to “pulling the wool over their eyes.” They clearly rejected God’s promises, referring to Egypt as a land flowing with milk and honey (Num 16:13–14). Their rebellion was ultimately against God, not Moses and Aaron.

Moses told Korah that in the morning God Himself would show the one whom He had chosen to be His priest (16:5–7). Korah and all his company were to put fire on their censers and offer incense to the LORD (16:16–18). But their offering, like that of Nadab and Abihu, was not accepted by God (Lev 10:1–3). Therefore, the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron to distance themselves from the congregation before He destroyed the people (16:21). Moses and Aaron interceded for the people, praying that God would only judge those who had rebelled (16:22). They appealed to God as the creator, sustainer, and sovereign Lord of all flesh. Their appeal was to God’s mercy, the kindness God shows to people who do not deserve it (cf. Num 14:17–20). God was gracious and warned the people to move away from those who rebelled (16:23–30).

But God was also just, fair and right. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, along with all their households, were swallowed up by the earth while the 250 men who offered incense were destroyed by fire (16:31–35; cf. 26:9–10). But even

in the midst of judgment, God was merciful. Numbers 26:11 indicates that the sons of Korah were spared from God’s judgment, having separated themselves from their father’s house. To remind the Israelites that only Aaron’s descendants were allowed to burn incense before the LORD, the LORD had Eleazer hammer the censers of those who had sinned into a cover for the altar (Num 16:36–40).

In one sense, Korah was correct. Those who trust in the LORD are a holy people (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9). But the rebels twisted God’s truth and used it as cover for their own rebellion. They perverted God’s word like all false teachers do (Jude 4–11). Therefore, God was just in judging these rebels. Yet in the sons of Korah we also see God’s grace (26:11). Some of Korah’s descendants would author psalms. Eleven psalms are attributed to the sons of Korah (Pss 42, 44–49, 84, 85, 87, 88). Psalm 46 even became the text from which Martin Luther wrote the hymn “A Mighty Fortress” which has blessed the Church for centuries.

THINK ABOUT IT

Failure to follow God’s ways is an invitation to experience God’s wrath.



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

Israel rejects God's prophet and priest • Numbers 16:1–17:11



The people rebelled against Moses and Aaron, but Moses and Aaron interceded for them (16:41–50)

Even though the people had seen the ground split open and fire flash forth from the LORD, they grumbled against Moses and Aaron the next day (16:41). They should have acted as a priestly people by repenting, mourning, and confessing sin (Exod 19:6), but instead they rebelled against the LORD. They accused Moses and Aaron of being responsible for the death of the 250 men who defiantly burned incense. (Num 16:41). They demonstrated that even though they were called to be holy nation they were far from holy.

God affirmed His choice of Aaron and Moses when the ground opened up and fire consumed those who had disregarded God's instructions. By rebelling against Aaron and Moses the people demonstrated their rejection of God's chosen leaders and His law. God again came to the defense of His chosen leaders (Num 16:45; cf. 12:4; 14:10b), threatening to annihilate the people (16:45; cf. Exod 32:10; Num 14:11–12; 16:21). But again Moses interceded for the people (Exod 32:11–14; Num 14:13–19; 16:45). He told Aaron to take up his censer, put fire in it from the altar, and offer incense on it to make **atonement** for the people, to repair their relationship with God (16:46). Burning incense was symbolic of prayer (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3–4).



THINK ABOUT IT

The true servant of God is marked by sacrificial service for the people of God.

avoid all possible contact with the dead (Lev 21:11), but Aaron humbled himself, risking his own life for the sake of the people. Aaron's priestly work is a picture of Christ's priestly work when He would offer up His own life for the sake of the people (Heb 7:27).

Aaron demonstrated his zeal for the LORD by making atonement for the people. He ran into the midst of the people and stood between the dead and the living to intercede for the people. The high priest would typically

The LORD affirmed Aaron's role as priest (17:1–11)

God commanded Moses to get twelve staffs, one from each tribe, and to write the names of each leader on his respective staff, and to place all of them inside the Holy of Holies (17:1–4). In this way the LORD would provide a divine sign, showing everyone the tribe whom He had chosen (17:5). The LORD promised that He would cause a staff, a dead piece of wood, to sprout. Aaron's staff not only sprouted but also budded, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds (17:8). God had vindicated Aaron and commanded Moses to place the staff before the Ark of the Covenant. The staff, like the manna (Exod 16:33–35), was to serve as a reminder to the people (Num 17:10–11).

Finally, the people recognized their sin in challenging Aaron's special role as priest and feared for their lives (17:12–13). But God graciously gave them laws for the priests and the people to prevent approaching God in an unworthy manner (18:1–19:22). Approaching God was not to be taken lightly. Aaron did not exalt himself to the priesthood. God chose him to occupy this special role (Num 16:1–40; c.f. Heb 5:4), and God vindicated him when his authority was challenged by the people (Num 17:1–11).

Like Aaron before Him, Jesus did not exalt Himself to the position of great high priest (Heb 5:5); He was appointed as such by God (5:5–7). He functions as the perfect high priest who offered Himself for the sins of the people once for all (7:27). Presently, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, waiting for His enemies to be made a footstool under His feet (10:13). He is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), and He alone is able to save all those who draw near to God through Him (Heb 7:25). For if those who rejected Moses and Aaron in the wilderness received a just punished how will you escape God's judgment if you reject Christ?

THINK ABOUT IT

The heart of true worship is a submissive and humble heart.



Lesson Outline

We must worship God His way.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Korah was disobedient and argued with Moses and Aaron (16:1–40).
2. The nation of Israel rebelled against God, but Moses and Aaron prayed for the people (16:41–50).
3. God let everyone know that He chose Aaron to be the priest (17:1–11).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Korah and many others questioned the leadership of Moses and Aaron (16:1–40).
 - Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron (16:1–19).
 - The LORD announced His judgment on the people, but Moses and Aaron prayed for the people (16:20–22).
 - God graciously warned the people to move away from the rebels (16:23–30).
 - The LORD judged the people and gave them a sign to prevent further rebellion (16:31–40).
2. The people rebelled against Moses and Aaron, but Moses and Aaron interceded for them (16:41–50).
 - The day after Korah's rebellion, the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron (16:41).
 - God sent a plague among the Israelites (16:42–46).
 - Aaron took fire from the altar and offered incense to make atonement for the people (16:46–48).
 - The plague killed 14,700 people before it was stopped (16:49–50).
3. The LORD affirmed Aaron's role as priest (17:1–11).
 - God commanded Moses to place one staff from each tribe inside the Holy of Holies (17:1–4).
 - The LORD would provide a divine sign showing the tribe whom He had chosen (17:5).
 - The LORD made Aaron's staff sprout, bud, blossom, and produce ripe almonds (17:8).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

Israel rejects God's prophet and priest • Numbers 16:1–17:11



Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. Why did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram complain?**
They did not want Moses and Aaron to be their leaders
- 2. How did God punish the rebellious people?**
The earth opened up to consume them, and God sent fire to destroy them.
- 3. How was the plague stopped?**
Aaron took a censer and incense and stood between the living and the dead, making atonement for the people.
- 4. How did God show the Israelites that Aaron was His chosen priest?**
Aaron's rod not only sprouted the next morning, it had also produced ripe almonds. God had clearly chosen Aaron as high priest.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. Who rebelled against Moses?**
The families of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On, along with 250 leaders.
- 2. What was the reason they rebelled against Moses as their leader?**
They accused Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves over the congregation.
- 3. What was the consequence of Korah's rebellion?**
The ground split and swallowed the families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, along with all their possessions. Then fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense to the LORD.
- 4. What was the reaction of the people the next day?**
They were angry with Moses and Aaron and blamed them for killing the people.
- 5. What did God want to do about their rebellion?**
God wanted to destroy the people.
- 6. What was Moses and Aaron's reaction to God's judgment on the people?**
Moses told Aaron to put fire from the altar in a censer and put incense on it. Aaron then ran among the people, between the living and the dead, to make atonement for their sin.
- 7. What did God tell Moses to do so that He could vindicate His leaders?**
God commanded Moses to get twelve staffs, one from each tribe, and to write the name of each leader on his respective staff, and to place them inside the Holy of Holies.
- 8. How did God show the Israelites that Aaron was His chosen priest?**
Aaron's rod not only had sprouted the next morning, it had also produced ripe almonds. God had clearly chosen Aaron as high priest.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



SHOE PRINTS

Before class, trace your shoes onto cardstock. Cut these out and use them as a pattern to create multiple pairs of shoe prints on construction paper. Tape these shoe prints to the classroom floor to create a path for children to follow. When children arrive for class, ask them to follow the path you've created being careful to step only on the shoe prints. Tell the children that in today's lesson we will learn about the Israelites failure to follow the leader that God had given them.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Line up the children and tell them to copy everything the line leader does (marching, bunny hopping, slow walking, etc.). Tell them how important it is to follow Jesus' lead and try to copy His life with our own.



AM I A LEADER?

Materials: a large covered basket or box filled with a variety of pictures of leaders

Directions: Pull out different pictures of leaders, one at a time, and ask the children whether they think they are a leader or not. Some examples of leaders include: Sunday school teacher, pastor, parents, police chief, and fire chief. Ask the children whom God sent to be their leaders (parents, grandparents, teachers, pastor, etc.). Explain that in today's lesson, the children will learn more about God's chosen leaders for Israel.

EARTHQUAKE TABLE

Before reading Numbers 16:15–40, push two tables together and set "tents" (half sheets of cardstock folded down the center) all over the tables. Be sure to put some tents on the line between the two tables. As you read the passage, have two helpers shake the tables and then spread them apart so that some of the tents fall into the crack. Then have them push the tables back together.



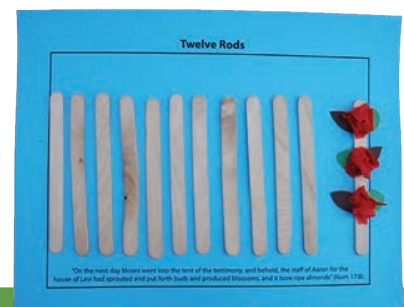
TWELVE RODS

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, craft sticks, brown and green construction paper, red tissue paper, and glue.

Directions: Print off a craft sheet for each student. Pre-cut almond shapes from brown construction paper and bud shapes from green construction paper. Give each child 12 craft sticks. Have the children glue 11 craft sticks to the craft sheet close together. Help the children to decorate the 12th craft stick with almond and bud pieces, as well as red tissue paper to show the flowers that bloomed. Glue this final craft stick onto the page separated from the other 11.

Twelve Rods
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2



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AGES 6–8



REBELLION

What is rebellion? It is more than just disobeying or refusing to obey. Rebellion includes rejecting the authority of the one in leadership. Have you ever rebelled against anyone? In today's lesson, we will hear what happens when a group of men rebel against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, God's chosen leaders.

TABLE LEADERS

Divide the class into groups and provide an activity for each group. Ideas include: putting together a puzzle, assembling a LEGO model, or designing a group mural. Designate one child as the leader. All the other children at the table must take directions from this child. Watch to see how they do. Some will be good leaders, and some will not do well at all. Similarly, some will be good followers, and some will not. God wants us all to follow the directions of the leaders whom He has placed in authority over us (president, teachers, parents, etc.). God put Moses and Aaron in charge of the Israelites. We will hear this morning that some others resented having to be under their authority.



ROD THAT BUDS

Bring in a wood staff to use as an illustration during your lesson. Ask the children why it was a miracle that Aaron's staff budded and produced ripe almonds. Show the children some almonds. Point out that God not only caused a dead piece of wood to produce fruit; He did it in an extremely short amount of time (it takes about 8 months after flowering for almonds to ripen). Tell the children that God used this miracle to confirm His choice of Aaron as priest.

I WANT MORE!

Choose a child at random to come up to the front of the class and award this child a prize. Tell the class that this child did nothing to earn this, but that you want him to have this special reward. Then, ask the class what they would think if this child rejected your gift, insisting that they deserve to be given something better? This is what Korah and his followers did when they challenged Aaron's authority as priest. God had given Korah and his family a very special role in the service of the tabernacle (see Num 4:1–20), but they weren't satisfied—they wanted more!



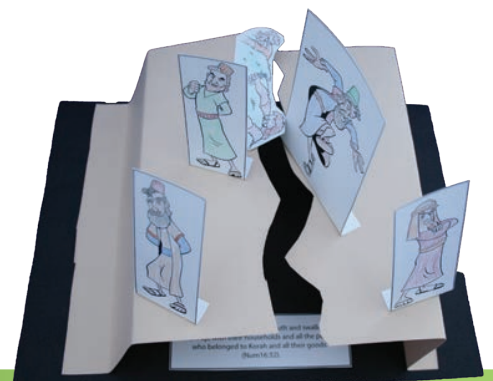
KORAH'S REBELLION PUNISHED

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, black construction paper, tan cardstock, crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Have the children color and cut out pictures from the craft sheet. Create an elevated stage from tan cardstock for the pictures to be glued on. Glue the bases of the stage to the black construction paper. Cut through the middle of the stage and make jagged edges to show the earth splitting apart. Glue the pictures to the stage and the verse underneath the stage as shown below.

Korah's Rebellion Punished
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

SUBMITTING TO LEADERS

Ask children what a leader is. Explain that a leader is a person who guides and directs others, either by going before them to show the way, or by giving commands or instructions. Ask the children why we need leaders. What happens without leaders? How should we respond to leaders when they give instructions or correction? In today's lesson, we will hear about Moses and Aaron, the two leaders whom God appointed over Israel to guide them to the Promised Land and give God's laws. We will hear what happened when Israel rebelled against God's leaders and even God's authority.

NOT SATISFIED

Before the lesson, read Numbers 4:1–20 together as a class. This passage reveals the special job that God had given to Korah and his family. He had already been given significant duties at the tabernacle, but he wanted more. He wasn't satisfied with God's provision—he was discontent.



ILLUSTRATE

"JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE"

John Davison Rockefeller, Sr (July 8, 1839 – May 23, 1937) was an American businessman and philanthropist. He revolutionized the petroleum industry, co-founding Standard Oil Company in 1870. At one time he was the world's richest man. Adjusting for inflation, his fortune is valued at \$336 billion. He is one of the richest men in history. However, when he was once asked, "How much money is enough money?" He famously replied, "Just a little bit more." No amount of money could satisfy his desire for more. So too with Korah and those who followed him in rebellion. Korah had been given significant duties in the tabernacle, but he wanted more—he wanted the priesthood, too.

SWALLOWED ALIVE

The families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed alive by the ground in punishment for their rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Utilize the following short video to help the children picture this miraculous punishment God inflicted upon the rebellious people: <https://goo.gl/jV5cwh>



APPLY

COMPASSION

In Numbers 16:41–50, the people of Israel again complained against the leaders God had placed over them. But what was Moses and Aaron's response? Did they get angry and desire revenge? No. Moses and Aaron responded with compassion. They desired good for the Israelites, rather than wanting to hurt them in revenge. How does God want us to respond when someone sins against us or attacks us? Read Romans 12:21 together as a class and discuss how Moses and Aaron responded to the people's rebellion.