

**Korah's Rebellion**

Passages: Num 16

*Memory Verse*

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28–29)

<b>Knowledge of God's Will [God's Word]</b>	<b>Knowledge of God [God's Divine Nature]</b>	<b>Good Works [Behavior]</b>
Korah's rebellion culminated in the tragic deaths of thousands of Israelites because of their sins against God.	God will consume those who go against Him and His appointed workers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Learn to be united in heart and spirit, and be a positive influence.</li><li>2. Do not allow ourselves to be influenced negatively or become part of divisions in the church.</li></ol>

*Overview*

**Events and Spiritual Teachings**

- A. Korah: Failure to Value God's Blessings
- B. Moses' Response
- C. Dathan and Abiram: Failure to Understand God's Will
- D. God's Response
- E. The Israelites: Blind to Sin

**Life Application:** Learning to Be United in the Church

**Memory Verse**

**Conclusion:** Within any community, especially the church, we need to be aware of how our attitude can influence others. We need to be sensitive to the things we say and do, and be careful that we ourselves are not negatively influenced by others.

## *Spiritual Teachings*

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### **Introduction**

Today, we will be studying another example of the Israelites' rebellion against the Lord. However, this time, the rebellion was not because they felt that they lacked something or because they were afraid. This time, the rebellion was stirred up by a specific group of people who desired power. The leading figure in this case was a man named Korah, a Levite and one of the sons of Kohath.

### **The Sons of Kohath**

The Bible records that Korah was descended from Kohath, of the tribe of Levi. Numbers 4:4–15 records that the sons of Kohath were in charge of carrying the various items for the tabernacle, such as the dishes, lampstands, and utensils used for making sacrifices. Korah was part of a team with an incredibly important job, as they carried the vessels required for God's holy sanctuary.

### **A. Korah: Failure to Value God's Blessings**

Let's begin by reading Numbers 16:1–3. The Bible describes that Korah brought together a group of people to follow him. This wasn't a casual or accidental gathering. He purposefully recruited influential leaders from among the Israelites in an organized and direct challenge against Moses and Aaron. Unfortunately, they did not seem to realize or care that by opposing Moses, they were directly opposing God Himself. Let's now look at Korah's words.

**1. "You take too much upon yourselves..."**

Other versions translate this as, "You go too far!" His completely unjust statement ignores the fact that Moses had been appointed by the Lord Himself. Korah is also clearly ignorant of the amount of grief and frustration that Moses has had to endure while shepherding the Israelites.

**2. "...for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them."**

There is great irony in this statement, as he said it shortly after the Israelites' refusal to enter the promised land. Korah was clearly not close enough to God to be able to understand or define holiness. He was simply using it as an excuse to support his argument, and to make it sound like he was speaking for the congregation. Ultimately, this statement merely showed his ignorance regarding both true holiness and the spiritual state of the Israelites. This ignorance would have made him a poor choice as a priest and shepherd for God's flock.

**3. "Why then do you exalt yourselves before the assembly of the LORD?"**

Again, an unjust statement considering the grief that Moses has experienced, and the multiple times he and Aaron have had to intercede on the Israelites' behalf. In reality, these words are a reflection of Korah's own heart. He accused Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves because he himself wanted to be elevated.

From examining Korah's words, we can conclude that the rebellion arose because there was a problem with their relationship with God. Even though they were God's chosen, Korah and his followers didn't value the blessings that God had already given to them. They thought that they deserved more.

### **B. Moses' Response**

Let's read Numbers 16:4–6. Moses' first reaction was to fall on his face before the Lord. This means that his very first response to the new crisis was to turn to God. He understood that this was a serious matter that required God's hand, and that the results would not bode well for the rebels. He then instructed Korah and his followers to take censers, with fire and incense, and present themselves to the Lord the

next day. This instruction is significant, as offering incense to the Lord was part of the priestly duty that they coveted. Since they deemed themselves worthy, Moses was giving them a taste of what they wanted. He was allowing them to stand directly before God's judgment as priests.

Let's continued by reading verses 8–11. Moses addressed Korah specifically, and through a series of questions, pointed out the true motive behind his actions. Let's take a moment to examine Moses' words phrase by phrase.

**1. "Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel..."**

Korah and his followers did not value the position that they already had. When we have had something for a long time—whether it is a toy, a new piece of technology, or a social status—we tend to forget its value and treat it with less care. The same often applies to our status as God's children. We must never forget that to be separated for God's purpose is a rare and wonderful thing for which we need to give thanks every day.

**2. "...to bring you near to Himself..."**

Although they had been separated for God's work, it is apparent that they did not hold any particularly special relationship with the Lord. God had brought them near to Him, but they didn't value this relationship, nor did they attempt to deepen their ties to the Lord. We might also forget that although we have the Holy Spirit or have been baptized, we still need to constantly try to draw closer to God in our everyday lives.

**3. "...to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD..."**

Because we aren't being paid, or aren't receiving any immediate rewards for it, we often don't care as much about our church work. We might spend less time preparing, or don't even bother preparing at all, for our assigned duties. But as Moses points out, it is not a small thing to do God's holy work. Not everyone can work for Him, so it is important to remember that there is value in our service to God.

**4. "...and to stand before the congregation to serve them [...]?"**

Korah and his followers probably missed this point entirely: the purpose of their positions was not so that others could exalt them, but instead, so that they could serve others. The world around us associates positions of authority with luxury and power. But in God's realm, leaders have the responsibility to serve (Lk 22:26).

**5. "And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"**

Here, Moses drew a final conclusion about their rebellion: he and his company were in fact rebelling against the Lord, not against Aaron. This is because Aaron's authority was given by God.

**C. Dathan and Abiram: Failure to Understand God's Will**

As a part of his response to this uprising, Moses sent for two of the perpetrators. However, they refused to come forward in blatant rebellion against Moses' authority. Let's read what they said in verses Numbers 16:12–14. These two completely forgot or chose to ignore the fact that they were condemned to the wilderness because of their own refusal to enter Canaan. As is often the case when someone is caught up in their own self-righteous pride, they ignored their own mistakes and blamed someone else.

Let's look closely at one particular part of their response. "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 [...]?" (v. 13). In what seemed like the ultimate insult to God, they referred longingly to Egypt. They forgot not only that they were enslaved, but also God's mighty hand in freeing them, and the reason for their current punishment. Overall, we can see that they had a poor relationship with God and, more importantly, didn't understand His will.

#### **D. God's Response**

The next day, Korah and his followers gathered at the tabernacle with their censers. Let's read verses Numbers 16:16–19. Notice that Korah "gathered all the congregation against [Moses and Aaron] at the door of the tabernacle of meeting" (v. 19). Perhaps he simply wanted witnesses to the event, or perhaps he had convinced them to join his cause. Regardless, one group's dissent had once again influenced the entire nation to rebel against God's will.

Let's continue and read verses 20–22. Once again, the Lord determined to consume the entire congregation in severe judgment. And once again, despite the false accusations and grief that they were both experiencing, Moses and Aaron interceded on their behalf. Considering how rebellious the people were being, we might feel like they deserved such punishment, so it's difficult for us to understand why they chose to intercede for them. However, we can learn from the heart of Moses and Aaron, and pray for others in such critical moments. Ultimately, however, we should leave any condemnation and judgment in God's hands.

How did Moses and Aaron appeal to God? Let's read verse 22 again. "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?" Their plea is quite optimistic in that they tried to shift the focus to one person. But it was also clear that many had willingly chosen to follow Korah's rebellious example. Consequently, we can see God's justice in His punishment of each man according to his sin. Let's continue with verses 23–35.

Although Moses and Aaron had successfully saved the rest of the congregation from the Lord's wrath, those with the most serious sin of confronting God's decisions received their punishment. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed by the earth along with their families. The 250 who were offering incense were also consumed with fire, proving that they were not qualified to be priests. God displayed His great power and justice before the Israelites. However, although Moses and Aaron had interceded on their behalf, the following day, the congregation blamed them for the death of Korah and his followers!

#### **E. The Israelites: Blind to Sin**

Let's read Numbers 16:41–50. This last passage is quite incredible. Despite witnessing the wrath and judgment of God in person, the congregation still had complaints against Moses and Aaron! It was as if they were utterly blind to their sins and the sins of those who had been punished. Korah and his followers had died precisely because of their complaining hearts, yet now we have the remainder of the people complaining about the deaths of those who had sinned! When the Lord appeared again, He was once again intent on consuming the Israelites. This time, however, He did not allow Moses nor Aaron to intercede.

Seeing that the plague had already begun, Moses hurriedly sent Aaron out with a censer to offer incense in atonement for the people. Both his and Aaron's reactions are remarkable. These are the very same people who had falsely blamed them and complained against them. Yet Moses immediately reacted to

save them, and Aaron “ran” to the middle of the assembly. The Bible’s description of this event is striking: “And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped” (v. 48). In this perilous moment for the Israelites, Aaron served as a wall between life and death!

The original source of this entire conflict may have been one group’s resentment and pride, but it is clear that the rest of the Israelites were blind both to their own sins and to the sins of others. This blindness ultimately culminated in a tragic event that cost the lives of 14,700 Israelites. Overall, the rebellion was rooted in three general problems: the rebels’ failure to value God’s blessings, their blindness to God’s will, and their blindness to sin.

### Check for Understanding

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- 1. What can we conclude about the reason for Korah’s rebellion after examining his words?** We can conclude that the rebellion arose because there was a problem with their relationship with God. They didn’t value the blessings that God had given to them, and thought they deserved more.
- 2. What is the meaning behind Moses’ words, “And what is Aaron that you complain against him”?** He concluded that Korah and his company were in fact rebelling against the Lord, not against Aaron.
- 3. What do Dathan and Abiram’s words tell us about their relationship with God?** They had a poor relationship with God and, more importantly, didn’t understand His will.
- 4. What did Moses and Aaron do when the Lord told them, “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment” (v. 21)? Why is this unusual?** They fell on their faces and interceded on the Israelites’ behalf. This is unusual because they were interceding for the same people who were rebelling against them and accusing them unjustly.
- 5. What three problems was this rebellion rooted in?** The rebels’ failure to value God’s blessings, their blindness to God’s will, and their blindness to sin.

### Life Application

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#### Learning to Be United in the Church

From examining the Israelites’ actions in the wilderness, we can see that disorder, chaos, and division can have serious effects on the congregation, not just upon individuals. Their refusal to enter Canaan, Korah’s antagonism against Aaron and Moses, and the Israelites’ complaints for food were all rebellions sparked by individuals or groups of people who allowed their physical desires to interfere with everyone’s relationship with God, not just their own. Seeing this, we should try to learn the best ways to remain in unity, to bring up issues without causing conflict, and to solve problems without leading everyone astray from God, all while remaining at peace with each other.

#### Why do divisions occur?

First, why do divisions occur? When we are self-centered, divisions naturally occur, along with strife and envy, just as in Korah’s rebellion. When we are more concerned with our own interests, we forget that God has called each of us to be united in spirit and in heart. We ignore the fact that God desires for us to look out for each other’s interests so that we can grow together in faith. Moreover, when we cause conflicts, we have forsaken God’s will and endangered our salvation.

#### Testimony

*While a visiting preacher was leading service, a member of the church suddenly stood up and declared angrily in front of the congregation that he would leave the church. He complained against the preacher and the church for not helping local members with certain aids. Some members tried persuading them not to leave, but the member departed, along with some others that followed him.*

*The next day, this member returned to church, but during the prayer, he was found outside of the building, shaking. When questioned, he said that during prayer, he felt a force dragging him out of the chapel and throwing him out of the building. The members were thankful that during a time of conflict, God Himself directly intervened to deal with the perpetrator. Thankfully, the member who had committed the wrong was able to experience God's punishment for his rebellion and actions in the church. As a result, he later became a very good believer. Although he was poor and had to walk 5 kilometers to church, he became one who was always first to arrive despite it taking him over an hour to walk. He was able to truly appreciate that worshipping God is a privilege and blessing, and no longer caused conflict among the members.*

– Anonymous

### Discussion

- **What wrong did the member commit?**

He angrily made a public complaint against the preacher during the service, in front of the whole congregation. This abruptly disturbed the speaker and all the members while worshipping the Lord and influenced others to walk out of the church with him. Although he harbored opinions that caused him to be unhappy, he could have spoken calmly at an appropriate time to the visiting preacher. On deeper reflection, he could have re-evaluated his reason for complaining and come to realize the blessings of receiving the words of God through a visiting worker and the privilege of worshipping God with fellow members in peace.

- **Why did God take the drastic action of throwing him out of the church?**

Not only was his public and angry demonstration completely irreverent behavior in the house of God, but he had also already influenced some other members to rebel and caused division within the church. If God hadn't dealt severely with him, his continued rebellion would have had a further negative influence on others. His actions were similar to the actions of Korah, and God had to intervene to put an end to such rebellion. Thankfully, in the case of this member, God was merciful and gave him a chance to change.

### How can we be united in the church?

In order to be united, we need to have the correct mentality towards God's work. Paul and Apollos partook in different stages of the work in Corinth. They were not in opposition, but working for the same cause, complimenting each other's works. God is the one who makes the harvest grow, so he who plants, and he who waters are equal. By remembering that we are all equal in Christ, we will be less likely to look down upon or raise other members up unnecessarily. The Bible says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps 133:1). What does it mean to dwell in unity though? Let's look at a few verses and see what the Bible says about dwelling in unity.

- *"[B]earing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." (Col 3:13–14)*

One of the hardest things for us to do is to forgive others. We tend to hold on to grudges or let our past interactions with someone affect how we treat them in the present and future. But even while hanging on the cross, dying for our sins, the Lord Jesus Christ forgave us for it. So, we must do likewise, bear His love for one another, and forgive others. Have you ever let your past

arguments, grudges, or judgments affect how you interacted with someone later?

- “[I]n lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Phil 2:3–4)

It is easy to look out for our own interests more than others’. It is human nature to want what is best for ourselves. But the Bible teaches us that we should place the needs of others above our own. Have you ever given something up for someone else, such as your time, the last piece of your favorite food, or perhaps a treasured item? There are many ways we can place others’ interests above our own. Try brainstorming whose interests or needs you can support this week.

- “[W]alk [...] with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:1–3)

When we dislike or disagree with someone, it is easy to become impatient or even angry with them with each interaction. But the Lord wants us to learn patience and gentleness. No matter how someone acts—even if it is against the Bible’s teachings, or even if you feel that they are in the wrong—we should not lash out at them, but instead treat them gently and patiently, speaking to them with love and not anger. In this way, we can teach them through our actions and avoid forming a rift between you and the other person, or within the church. Think of someone you dislike or have disagreed with. How can you greet them the next time you see them?

From these verses, we can see that while divisions occur when we are self-centered, unity is about walking together in love, forgiveness, and support for each other. Paul wrote, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) If we see someone who is weak physically or spiritually, or who is facing a difficult problem or trial, then we should do our best to help them with love instead of centering our lives around ourselves. Peter also teaches us that we should have “compassion for one another,” and to love one another “as brothers” (1 Pet 3:8). When we do, our church will be unified in heart and spirit.

### Memory Verse

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“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:28–29)

### Meaning

God has given us the chance to receive the heavenly kingdom and appointed us the privilege to serve. However, we must do so with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire who will consume those that seek to rebel against Him.

### Conclusion

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Within any community, especially the church, we need to be aware of how our attitude can influence others. Being a positive influence is not easy, but being a negative influence easily affects many people. We need to be sensitive to the things we say and the way we behave, and be careful that we ourselves are not negatively influenced by others. If possible, we must counteract negativity with words of encouragement, hope, and obedience to God. We should pray for those who are rebelling against God

Junior 1 Year 2 Book 2 Lesson 5

that God may have mercy on them, and that the rest of the church can be protected against divisions, and instead remain unified and rooted in the truth.



Lesson 5 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What attitude should we have when serving God?  
*We should serve Him with reverence and godly fear.*
2. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ let each \_\_\_\_\_ others better than \_\_\_\_\_. Let each of you look out not only for his own \_\_\_\_\_, but also for the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.” (Philippians 2:3–4)  
*lowliness, mind, esteem, himself, interests, interests, others.*
3. What was the main reason Korah and his followers rebelled against Moses?  
*They did not value the position that God had already given to them.*
4. What can we learn from Moses and Aaron’s reaction when God determined to consume Israel?  
*We can learn from their intercession and pray for others in critical moments. Ultimately, however, we should leave any condemnation and judgment in God’s hands.*
5. Why do divisions occur?  
*They occur when we are self-centered and are more concerned with our own interests.*
6. Pick one Bible verse about dwelling in unity. Explain how you can improve upon what we learned regarding this verse.  
*See Life Application.*
7. Have you ever been part of a conflict? How can you approach such situations in the future?  
*Personal answers.*