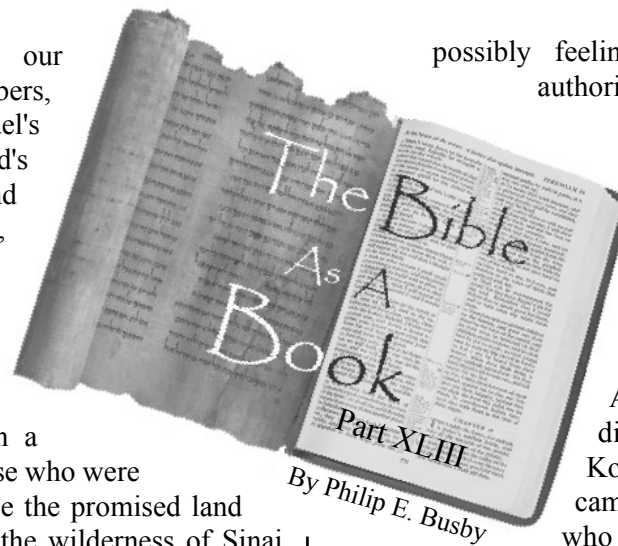


As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, our last segment covered Israel's rebellion and mistrust of God's promise to give them the land He had been guiding them to, and the fact this meant they would now take a journey of forty years through the wilderness before the nation could come into the land of promise. This was also, with a couple exceptions, so only those who were children at this time would see the promised land one day. As Israel returns to the wilderness of Sinai, God begins to give them ordinances for how to follow His Laws in ways that would make them more mindful of the fact they were God's chosen nation, not just a group of people who should be guided by their own thoughts! This brought us through the end of chapter 15, and we are ready to begin chapter 16.

Considering the events that had just taken place before this time, chapter 16 opens with a very amazing story of another rebellion against how God set up the nation and specifically Moses' leadership! God had specifically taken the tribe of Levi for His service, from among the children of Israel, in place of all the first-born in Israel. Jacob's son Levi had four sons, all of whom became namesakes of divisions within the tribe of Levi. These family divisions were placed one on each of the four sides of the tabernacle as Israel camped, and had special duties regarding the maintenance and movement of the tabernacle as Israel traveled. The Kohathites, named for Levi's son Kohath, camped on the south side and were the family responsible for carrying the tabernacle's most holy elements such as the altars, menorah, the Ark of the Covenant, etc. Now, Kohath had four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Moses and Aaron were the sons of Kohath's oldest son Amram, and their leadership roles as well as their separation even from the rest of the tribe of Levi were/are apparent. However, a descendant of Kohath's youngest son Uzziel was named the head of the Kohathites as one of the four family divisions of Levi. (Num. 3:27-32) Possibly feeling slighted by the fact he expected to be named head of the Kohathites, a son of Kohath's second son Izhar, who's name was Korah, brought a challenge against Aaron's position directly.

Looking at the tribes as a whole, we know Jacob had twelve sons and Reuben was the oldest. Also



possibly feeling the tradition of passing authority to the oldest was somehow being violated due to the fact Judah seemed to be taking the leadership role as a tribe, three men from the tribe of Reuben would bring a challenge against Moses' authority over the nation at this same time. Along with these, and more directly in relationship to Korah's challenge of Aaron, came two hundred and fifty men who were also considered very respected men among Israel. How many of these were of Levi or other tribes and how many were considered leaders over families or just men of great honor for one reason or another, we don't really know. However, they seem to be of a group believing they too should be considered for the position of High Priest, and they all accused Moses and Aaron of taking too much authority for themselves. They made the argument that especially considering the fact all the congregation was considered separated for the purposes of God, Moses and Aaron had no right to believe they held exclusive positions of leadership. They seemed to understand that without a king the High Priest would end up being the closest thing to a national leader once Moses was gone, and this is likely why they found it important to not allow that position to belong so exclusively to one family.

Moses, not Aaron, acting as a buffer of sorts between these men and their most dangerous coming against the Lord's anointed, falls on his face to show his humility (a quality very rare but very important in a leader) and prayerful grievance to God. He then tells Korah, along with those who came with him, that the next day God would show them all who the man was God had chosen to be the High Priest! Moses goes on to explain each one of them were to bring a censer with fire and incense before God the next day in order for God to answer their challenge. However, Moses admonishes Korah and the Levites in general about how much they were already standing in a position of great responsibility before The Lord, and to think about the fact they were demeaning their calling in believing they needed a share in the High Priesthood as well. Moses also points out they were not challenging Aaron in this matter, but God Himself!

These words to Korah and the others seeking what he sought may have caused one of the three men from the tribe of Reuben, named On, to abandon his cause, as Moses only calls out the other two men, Dathan and Abiram, in order to deal with the challenge to Moses' overall leadership. These two brothers refused to do anything Moses instructed. They would not go or come anywhere at anytime for him. They simply accused Moses of leading the people out of Egypt, which they describe as a land flowing with milk and honey, and killing them in the wilderness only for the purpose of making himself a king over Israel. They also accused Moses of being directly responsible for God's judgment on the people that was actually caused by them failing to believe God was able to bring them into the promised land, by bringing up the fact he had not given them a new land. They insinuate that if given the chance Moses might be devious enough to harm them as an example of what he does to political opponents by putting out their eyes or the like. In a rare moment of not standing between such people and God's wrath, Moses asks God not to respect these men, and points out, unlike a king, Moses had taken nothing from the people nor ever done anything to harm them! Moses then reiterates to Korah that he and the two hundred and fifty other men with him were to do as he had instructed if they wanted God's answer, and Aaron would do the same.

The next day, Korah and his men showed up at the door of the tabernacle with the censers as they had been instructed. They also assembled the entire congregation to witness what they must have felt was going to be vindication. Thus, in the presence of the entire nation, God's glory appeared and instructed Moses and Aaron to separate themselves out from the people so God could wipe them all out in that one moment. Moses along with Aaron, once again, stand in the gap for the people, and falling on their faces ask God not to destroy the entire nation because of the arrogant sinfulness of one man. To this, God responds that Moses is to go out and warn the people to separate themselves from the literal area around the dwellings of the three men who led this rebellion. Moses immediately gets up and goes specifically to the places where these three lived, to instruct the people to get away and not even touch anything that belonged to these families if they did not want to take part in their sin. The elders of Israel followed Moses in giving these instructions in order to at least witness what was to happen, if not help get the people away. Knowing the rebellion that was in the people's hearts, these elders

might have feared the people would be foolish enough not to listen to Moses at this point.

Since both the Kohathites and the tribe of Reuben camped on the south side of the tabernacle, one can presume this cleared the area to the south, with the exception of these three households. As this happened, the two men of the tribe of Reuben came and stood at the doors of their tents with their families, and Moses begins to explain how they all would know that Moses had not taken the actions he had by following his desires, but by what God had told him to do. Moses said if these men died a natural death in any way it would prove God had not sent Moses. However, it would be known among all the people that Moses was only following God's instructions if God did something the people had never seen before, which was for the ground to open up and swallow these men along with all that belonged to them. When Moses had finished explaining this, the ground did, in fact, open up, and these two men along with their families, servants, and all they possessed fell into an instantaneous grave which closed back up on them. This happened to the entire family and household of Korah as well, and when the people saw it and heard the cries of those going down into the pit, they began to run away for fear the ground would open up and they would all be consumed. As this was happening, fire came out of the pillar of God and consumed Korah and the other men who had brought their censers before the door of the tabernacle!

This brought to an end those who brought yet another challenge concerning their ability to form the national structure of Israel instead of simply following what God had set up and instructed them to do. Because it was important Aaron not be defiled by going among the ashes of the dead bodies, his son Eleazar was sent to collect the brass censers and gather up the fire and ash of the men who had been killed before the tabernacle. This ash was to be carried out of the camp to a desolate place much like the instructions for ashes from the altar. Because the censers survived this fire and had been offered before The Lord, they became part of what belonged to God in the same way anything offered to God would be. However, they would not be used as censers, but God commanded the metal be reworked and used to make thick plates for the altar of burnt offering, the wooden structure of which had already been overlaid with brass when it was made. However, every time the people came to offer at the tabernacle, these thick plates, which would now cover the altar as well, served as a reminder of this event and how only

Aaron and his line were to preside as the priests to present offerings before God!

Unfortunately, it did not take long for the people to get over their fear of what had happened that day to those who rebelled against God's will. In an absolutely astonishing show of how much people think God is nothing but a power that can be harnessed and used for their own purposes, the very next day they began to accuse Moses and Aaron of being responsible for killing the people of God. It was as if they believed Moses had manipulated the power to kill other men they saw as servants of God. As the people gathered themselves against Moses and Aaron, they looked toward the tabernacle and saw the pillar of cloud over it as God once again started to show forth His glory from it. Moses and Aaron would go before the tabernacle where God again instructs them to get away from the people so He could consume them all in a moment. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces before God, but this time they could not make the argument this was the sin of one man or a few men.

Moses knowing there was only so much they could do to stand between God and the people at this point, instructs Aaron to fill a censer with fire off the altar and take incense to go out among the people and do what he could to offer an atonement for them! Moses knew the wrath of God was already at work, and as Aaron runs out, he finds a plague had already begun to kill the people. Putting the incense on the fire of his censer, he offered an atonement to God for them. The plague would stop consuming the people and Aaron would find himself standing between those who had died and those still alive, as if he was a shield of sorts! Not counting those who had died the day before, this incident alone killed 14,700 people. The plague had been stopped, and Aaron returned to Moses where he had remained before God at the door of the tabernacle.

After all this, God gives the people something they or, at the very least, all their leaders could take part in, but would show that Moses had not just put his brother at the head of the priesthood. The people had seen God act to destroy and kill when they came against Moses and Aaron, but God wanted to give the people something miraculous that had nothing to do with wrath or destruction, in order to confirm who He had chosen from among them to be His priest. For this, each of the twelve tribes were to bring a wooden rod or branch with the name of their tribe carved into it. This would be something the people of the tribes would pick out and

know belonged to them. The tribe of Levi was also to choose a rod, but upon it, instead of the name Levi, Aaron's name was to be carved. These thirteen rods were to be placed inside the Holy Place where God would meet with Moses, and the one that God caused to blossom would show specifically God's will. The fact God asked all twelve tribes to bring a rod to be placed in the tabernacle should have been a sign in and of itself, but the blooming of one of them would, at the very least, prove who God intended to administer His service there!

Moses collects the rods from the leaders of the tribes and puts them where God had said to put them. The next day when Moses went in to meet with The Lord, the rod of Aaron had on it all three stages of a plant's life cycle for reproduction. It had buds, it had buds that had already bloomed, and it had fully developed almonds on it. Moses took the rods out to the people for all of them to see what had happened, and they saw for themselves their rods had not been destroyed or changed and also what Aaron's rod alone had done. Each of the leaders took their rod to do with as they pleased, but God told Moses to bring Aaron's rod back inside the tabernacle as a witness against those who would question what God had chosen to do. Moses took the rod back inside as God had said, but when he came out the people showed their propensity to swing from one extreme to the other. They began to talk to Moses about the fact they believed now that God had made this point clear, they felt there was nothing they could bring before the tabernacle without God killing them. They just did not see how God, through the priesthood, was establishing a buffer between them and Himself so that such a thing would not happen. Indeed, God had shown a way for the people to come before His earthly throne!

Due to this on going misunderstanding, God begins to speak to Aaron about this buffer issue so he and his family might in turn teach the people. God explains to Aaron how the priesthood is a gift to Aaron's family. It was theirs to possess but also the all of what they were to be. While the people saw it as a position of power, God wanted Aaron to understand he and his family alone would bear the responsibility of the duties prescribed to them in offering the sacrifices and administering the tabernacle's ordinances on a daily basis. Those who would stand, not in their place, but next unto them in this, would be their family tribe of the Levites. The Levites would help them do the work of maintaining the tabernacle, and thus take many burdens

off them; but Aaron's house would still be responsible to oversee this work, and never were any of the Levites to take up the responsibilities of performing the ceremonies of the tabernacle, which only Aaron's house was to do. In maintaining this they would provide the safe path for the people to approach God as He dwelt in their midst. Anyone who circumvented this would die!

From there God begins to affirm to Aaron, once again, what it is they as priests had been given and what they had not. This list emphasizes how much God was giving them things the people would bring, which would provide their daily needs but not the things of this earth that would cause them responsibilities outside the ministry. The first item was to remind Aaron the heave offerings of the plant-based offerings and portions of the sin and trespass sacrifices that the people brought belonged to him and the males of his house to eat there on the holy ground of the tabernacle's courtyard. Of the offerings the people brought as gifts, the heave portions and all wave offerings were theirs, and could be eaten by anyone in their family as long as the person was ceremonially clean. This would never change. To be clear about this, God specifies all the fresh oil, the fresh juices, and newly harvested grains that were brought as offerings for Firstfruits, along with any offerings of first ripe fruits brought by the people throughout the year, belonged to them in this same way.

This same stipulation of things belonging to them applied to everything the children of Israel were to bring, because certain things automatically belonged to God in the same way first ripe fruit did. One specific is that of animals that were the first-born of their mother. This first-born stipulation was actually true for both animals as well as people. People are, of course, never sacrificed, and nor are those animals considered unclean, but this does not mean they don't belong to God. Thus, God gave a way for the people to redeem these by giving money instead in the amount of that equal to five shekels - as a shekel is determined at the sanctuary - when the person or animal was a month old. Cattle, sheep, and goats were never to be redeemed, but sacrificed to God. Their blood was to be sprinkled on the altar and their fat burnt on the altar. Then the flesh would belong to the priest just as any of the other sacrifice portions that are allowed to be eaten by all those in the priest's house. God calls this a covenant of salt, meaning not just that it was forever, but again that it was to preserve them in the work of The Lord.

As for those things that the priest's house and

the Levites would not have because they would be earthly burdens, they would not be given land of their own when the nation settled in the promised land. This is not to say they would have no place to live, as we later see the tribe was granted cities, but they were not to be farmers, herdsman, etc. Their inheritance in the promised land would be the tithe Israel was to bring, and their work was to be that of the tabernacle and later temple. No others were to do the jobs given to the priest's house and Levites in general. God even stipulates that others would die if they tried. Thus, it was incumbent on the Levites to take on the responsibilities God had given them without distraction of worldly things, or the things of God could not be done correctly. This small fact has a lot to do with what we see in the nation later on in its history!

For the next instructions that were to be given to the Levites as a whole, God would turn to Moses, and these would concern the way the Levites were to tithe. Every member of the nation was to tithe, but these tithes would become the property of the Levites, so God tells Moses to instruct the Levites that when they receive tithe of the people, the Levites were then to take a tenth part of what they had received and give it as a heave offering before The Lord. God goes on to explain that they were to give the best of what they received to heave offer, and, of course, heave offerings would then belong to Aaron's house. Since the heave offerings belonged to the priests, this technically meant anything they heave offered a tenth part of, that tenth still belonged to them. However, God makes it clear that in spite of this truth even the most holy things were to have a tenth heave offered by the priest before they themselves used it. If they did this, God would accept it as tithe from them in the same way He accepted all the physical giving of produce, money, and everything else from the rest of Israel. They were also not to fail in doing this because if they did, it would pollute the tithe and offerings of Israel with their sin in failing to do so, and this would result in the death of the priest(s).

Let's stay in God's Word!

