

Korach **Bald** **Final Attempt to Avoid the Wandering**
Torah: Numbers 16:1-18:32
Haftarah: I Samuel 11:14-12:22
Brit Chadashah: Acts 5:1-11
Reading: Richard p. 155 and Ps. 5. Jewish Hero: King Manasseh. Carrier: Andrea

This portion is the second last before the silent years of the wandering. We are given no direct information about what was said or done during those years, except to know that they had to walk with the L-rd with the same level and kind of faith and obedience that they had shown since they left Egypt to become the people of G-d.

They could have dispersed, but once this final rebellion failed, they accepted their punishment and prepared their children for the ultimate journey of faith which they had refused to embrace. Three groups of people suffer the lethal wrath of G-d, but there is a mystery around the fate on one of the initial rebels.

The levite Korach is mentioned along with three reubenites: Dathan, Abiram and On. After the initial challenge, On is not mentioned again. It is possible that he repented and abandoned the rebellion, but no details are given about this in the Scriptures. The tribe of Reuben descends from the oldest son of Jacob and many of them may have felt that the priesthood belonged to them, especially when they saw the apparent mess Moses was making of things.

Having the people defeated in their first encounter with the Canaanites and then spending an entire generation wandering aimlessly in the wilderness, was not what the people wanted and many placed the blame squarely on Moses and his leadership. A group of 250 respected leaders want to change how things are done and blame Moses for the decision to return to the wilderness instead of finding another solution.

What follows is a threefold punitive action by G-d to show that indeed Moses and the Aaronic leadership, spoke for Him and were not taking the camp in the wrong direction through personal preference or not understanding what G-d was really saying. There is always a big difference between not liking what G-d is saying and trying to get Him to say something else.

The rebels had blown their chance of entering and rather than killing all the people and starting over from scratch, a generational delay is given, both as a warning to the people of that day and to future generations. G-d says what He means and means what He says and any attempt to change His Word will never succeed.

The rebels are invited to come to the tent of meeting with their incense holders to see which group the L-rd receives (acknowledges). Korah is willing to appear, but the Reubenites refuse to gather at the tent of meeting. When Korah and his group appear before the tent of meeting with incense, only Moses is invited into the fiery presence of G-d and he again saves the lives of the rebels. Only the guilty ones will be killed and the people have to show their acceptance of this sentence by separating themselves from the rebels who are about to die. They are killed by two events which may have happened simultaneously. One by fire and another by being swallowed alive by a massive cave in.

Now you have to read the text very closely to see these two events in sequence. The people

associated with these rebels, all assembled at the entrance to their tents and the earth opened its mouth and they were swallowed alive. At the same time, the 250 who had assembled before the L-rd at the tent of meeting were consumed by a fire as they offered their incense before the L-rd. This should have put the final seal of authority on the Mosaic leadership, but there was still a considerable core of those who wanted G-d to say and to do differently from that which Moses declares.

The impression is given that a considerable crowd mobbed the tent of meeting, claiming that Moses and his leadership are responsible for killing supposedly innocent people. They may have wanted direct access to G-d and tried to take physical possession of the tent of meeting. They surround the tent and a plague begins to strike them down and only stops when Aaron takes his incense holder and holds it between the living and the dead.

The portion ends with a double confirmation of Moses and Aaron's leadership, as well as their sole possession over the tent of meeting and the presence of the L-rd. First the people are instructed to place twelve leadership staffs before the L-rd. Only Aaron's staff grew buds and flowers and had ripe almonds on it. This demonstration convinced the people that without Aaron and his sons, the presence of the L-rd would kill anyone else who tried to access it.

From at least this point on, the tabernacle is surrounded by Levites who will be serving the Aaronites who alone had access to the tent of meeting in the holy place – and once a year behind the veil. After this, there is no further attempt by the people to try and circumvent the Aaronic leadership in order to gain access to the presence of G-d. It was firmly established that G-d would speak to Aaron, who would speak to the Levites, who would then speak to the people.

There is also a discussion of which parts of the sacrifices belong to the Levites and which belong to the Aaronites. The Levites are to serve the Aaronites who were charged with carrying the sins of the people before the L-rd in order to gain atonement (cleansing). G-d may have been present in the camp, but He could only be accessed through the approved rituals which had to be performed by the people whom He personally designated for that purpose.

The Levites were to live off the tithes of the people, since the L-rd was their portion and the people brought the best of their portions to the L-rd. The Aaronites were to live off a tithe from the Levites, which was taken as a tithe from the people's tithe. The people were to serve the L-rd and listen to the Levites. The levites were to serve the Aaronites and to prevent the people from ever trying again to mob the L-rd. The chain of command was firmly set in place and the lost generation finally had to accept its fate and reap what it had sown.

Their glorious departure from the mountain had ended in shame when they doubted the L-rd's ability to deliver the land of Canaan into their hands in its entirety. They lost the right to enter and nothing they could do or say would alter this judgment. Three times the people are spared annihilation by the intervention of Moses and all the organized opposition to Moses' leadership is done away with as the people understand without a doubt that this man and his leadership truly speak for the L-rd and have the L-rd's seal of approval, both on what they do and in what they say. This seal is still their for those who accept His Word and walk according to what it proclaims – nothing more and nothing less. How about you?

Sermon: “ *Even more, we also boast in afflictions, knowing that affliction produces perseverance. This perseverance produces victory when we face trials and this victory*

gives us hope. This hope never disappoints because the love of G-d is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been give to us.” (Romans 5:3-5)

A few centuries ago, an Augustinian monk was crawling up the steps of a cathedral on his knees on broken glass. He would pause on each step and read a verse of the Scriptures. He read Romans 5:1 which says that we are justified by faith and have peace with G-d through our L-rd Yeshua Hamashiach. When he read this verse, he got to his feet and turned his back on the legalism he had been trying to access G-d through. His name was Martin Luther and before he drank too much beer and married a nun, he had many good things to say about walking with G-d.

I mention the beer because at the end of his life, he turned his back on the Jewish people and promoted a violent form of antisemitism. He was probably suffering from a form of dementia, but we could all suffer a similar fate whenever we turn our backs on the clear teachings of the Scriptures. Once we have discovered that we are justified by faith and have peace with G-d through our beloved Messiah, the good news does not stop there. From that point on, our lives become a pilgrimage to glory, where even the most daunting and darkest moments of our lives can be used by our King to build us up spiritually, instead of pulling us down.

It is actually a five fold process which should change the way we look at whatever trials and tribulations come our way. Once we have given our hearts and lives to the Messiah, He has got his “grace” hook into us and what remains of our earthly journey is merely Him slowly reeling us in. In other words, once our final destination is decided, everything else takes on a whole new meaning and can be used by Him to build us up spiritually.

Once we have peace with G-d through our beloved Messiah, everything else will line up behind this final victory and we will discover that there is nothing we can encounter in this life which will ever be allowed to remove His “grace” hook from our heart and life. Our lives can go from victory to victory as we learn to see things His way and as we learn to do things according to His Word.

The first element in this five fold process is affliction and this means that even though we are heaven bound, it will always be an uphill climb where any number of obstacles will try and block our way. Instead of growing angry or discouraged, we need to see every encounter of this kind as an opportunity to watch how the L-rd will help us to overcome in each situation.

There is in every trial a way of escape to prevent the hand of the L-rd from loosening its grip on our lives. Once we have passed the biggest trial of our lives and have given our heart to the L-rd, we need to look at every subsequent trial as a proving ground for Him to show us that greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. He has said that He will never leave us nor forsake us and He is now walking with us, hand in hand, so that we face the whatevers together, giving Him new opportunities to demonstrate His care and protection under fire.

We can boast in affliction and rejoice in trials because our lives have become like a long row of dominoes, which will all fall over one by one as we continue our journey to our Father's Home in glory.

This is not to say that we will not occasionally encounter big obstacles and trials which will bring us a lot of tears and cause us much grief. But truly, in the L-rd, the bigger they are, the harder they fall. We may not be able to resolve every conflict and sometimes our loss may be

astounding, but as we keep our final destination in mind, all and every affliction can have a series of impacts on us which the enemy of our souls has not intended.

As we learn to trust the L-rd and see His hand in all of our trials and affliction, we move onto the second element of the five fold process. We learn perseverance and do not lose hope when our faith is tested. We learn from experience that all trials are temporary and that our Messiah can teach us to overcome in every situation we encounter. Some things take time and sometimes we may even lose patience, but as we watch His hand bring us resolution in both the bigger and the smaller things, our trust in Him grows.

Instead of waiting for the sky to fall or our world to crumble into little pieces, we learn to watch for His provision and His deliverance, because we know for sure that they are coming. The Messiah's endgame with afflictions and suffering is to teach us the perseverance which will lead to victory, so that we can be more than conquerors in even the difficult situations we face. Some translations use the word character instead of victory, perhaps because we get stronger and our understanding of the Messiah deepens through the trials which we face.

However, I see the third element of this five fold process as victory, because in a very real sense we have learned how to deal with things in the L-rd, especially when we do not get our own way. Instead of whining or threatening to quit, like the wandering generation, we will go where the L-rd calls us to go and do what He calls us to do. Victory does not mean we will always win in every conflict we encounter, it means that we have learned whatever lesson and adopted whatever attitude we need to continue walking on the bumpy straight and narrow.

Once again we have refused to allow any trial come between us and our faith in the L-rd and we can rejoice in this victory as we see all of our shackles in the world come off, one by one. Once we have learned how to relate to trails, they build us up instead of tearing us down and we find ourselves in a perpetual win/win situation because even the worst that the enemy throws at us can be turned into good to build us up spiritually.

This is not just misplaced optimism, where we always look at the bright side of our lives. This is a tried and true conviction that whatever life throws at us, the L-rd will teach us how to handle it so that our reaction to it brings glory to His name. Our lives do not become a series of defeats, where one frustration follows another one in tedious accession. Our lives become a series of resolutions and victories where we have proven His word to be true, over and over again. And instead of dreading whatever life my bring next into our lives, we actually look forward to new challenges, because we know that our King has a perfect track record and will never let us down.

The fourth element in this fourfold process is hope and it is the kind which is based on acquired experience. This is because, as we see that the L-rd can teach us how to handle all and any of the complexities of this life, we become more and more confident that He will be able to see us all the way to our final home in glory. When we see the reality of what the L-rd can handle in this life, our confidence in His coming Glory grows alongside of it.

There is also another reason this hope does not disappoint and it involves an experience in the Holy Spirit. As we learn to rejoice in our trials and learn the perseverance which produces victory and builds up our character in the L-rd, the love of G-d is spread through our hearts by His Holy Spirit. Unresolved conflicts and spiritual defeat, grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, but

as we turn them over to the King and learn to resolve them according to His Word, there are fewer and fewer obstacles to His love in our hearts and lives.

I believe that the L-rd is real and that His Word is true. I believe in His death and resurrection with every fiber of my being. I believe more strongly in His return than I do in the daily rising and setting of the sun. But there is another personal testimony that is waiting for those who learn to face trials according to His Word. With each victory and with each resolution, He pours forth His love for us by the Holy Spirit.

It is as if He just turned on a tap and let His love flow through our hearts as a personal testimony and guarantee that He is always with us and always will be with us until the very end. It is something that He is saying to each of us personally because we have discovered that following His Word in every situation is indeed the key to victory and that He can rely on us to keep on relying on Him.

In a very real sense, we have proven ourselves to Him as we have watched Him prove Himself to us in a broad variety of situations. As we walk with the L-rd through trials we become convinced that He can teach us to handle anything which comes our way and we lose the uncertainty and dread which the world too frequently suffers from. We want to see what comes next and how He is going to handle even the accelerating pace of change in a world which is darkening almost by the hour.

Since He has proven Himself to us, we are not disappointed by what we have to face in this life, because we know He will deal with the next trial, with the effectiveness which He brings to every situation. As we learn to overcome in our lives, we see that His hand can overcome in anyone's life and we have no grounds for being disappointed as we walk with Him.

We rejoice in every trial because we know that He loves us. We rejoice in our perseverance, because we know that He loves us. We celebrate every victory because we know that He loves us. We know that He loves us because of the victory and the perseverance He has brought into our lives. We also know that He loves us because we are justified by faith and have peace with G-d through our beloved Messiah.

As we grow in the Messiah, we experience this love as the fifth element in this five fold process and it comes to us on two levels. First, it comes to us when we come to faith and realize the wonder of all that His death, resurrection and ascension has done for us – and what it still has in store for us yet. Secondly, there is a personal witness as we learn to surrender to His divine superintendence of our lives. This is an inner witness in our hearts where the Holy Spirit is almost saying: “see what I am doing in your life as you face ever so many trials – this is what I will personally continue to do for you daily, until that glorious day when I shall return to establish my everlasting kingdom over all the generations and kingdoms of mankind.” His love is not just about pie in the sky when you die, it is about being blessed and guided and directed every step of the way in the here and now. And the love which He sheds abroad in our hearts is His personal gift to us as we wander through this life.

In Him, we are never really alone. He walks right beside us and teaches and guides us and uses all that we face for our benefit, both in this life and in the one which is to come. Life may disappoint us. Our family and friends may disappoint us. Our local, provincial and federal governments may frequently disappoint us. The global economy and rising international

tension may disappoint us and even terrify us a little.

But our Messiah will never disappoint us because of the hope we have in Him and how we have seen what He can and will do as we face various trials in our lives. All that can happen to us in life, becomes nothing more than raw materials in the hands of the Messiah which He will use to make us stronger as we face various trials and afflictions in our lives.

Our final victory was guaranteed when we put our faith in what the Messiah did for us when He suffered and died and when He rose and ascended. However once this is settled, we are not called just to sit around and wait for the end, as if we had nothing better to do. In a very real sense, the Lord allows trials and tribulations to come into our lives so that we can see that He is Lord of this world that we are passing through, as well as being Lord of the world to come.

He wants us to see trials and afflictions as gifts from Him, which He will use to build spiritual character into our lives. He will use these afflictions to build perseverance into our hearts and lives. In a way He is teaching us how to fight so that we win and do not suffer loss as we face various trials in our lives. Once we become combat ready soldiers we are able to face any new trials which He brings our way and we are no longer afraid of whatever may be lurking around the corner of our lives, getting ready to pounce.

We have learned that He can be trusted and that His Word can be relied on, both in the bigger issues and in the more minor issues we must face in our lives. This personal witness makes the reality of the coming kingdom stronger and more relevant for us in our lives.

We may be disappointed with many things in our lives, but the way He guides and teaches us through the deep and dark valleys we are passing through, never disappoints. He not only led a sinless life, but He can teach even the worst sinner how to persevere and have victory, no matter where they came from and no matter what it is they are facing.

I want to turn my afflictions over to Him and to His victorious life. I want to let Him teach me perseverance so I can learn how overcome every obstacle which rises up against my faith in Him and His purposes. I want to turn my victory over to Him as trophies which His love prepared me to win. I want His love to be continually be flowing through my heart and life as I give the Holy Spirit access to more and more of my life.

I am doubly grateful to our Messiah. I am grateful for the victory He won for all mankind. I am also grateful that He has taken charge of my life and can use even my trials and tribulations to advance His kingdom purposes through me.

How are His kingdom purposes doing in your life? Are you grateful for what He is doing in your life? Is His love flowing out into your life because of the Holy Spirit which He has given to us? May He set us all free from anything and everything which will try and stop the progress of His kingdom in our lives and in the life of the shul.