

Korach **Korah (Bald)**
Torah: Numbers 16:1-18:32
Haftarah: I Samuel 11:14-12:22
Brit Chadashah: Acts 5:1-11

In this Torah portion, there are two final rebellions against Moses' leadership before the people finally accept the verdict that they will have to wander through the wilderness for an entire generation. All of this was to try and get the verdict changed or at least try to discredit Moses and try for a lighter sentence.

Some of the Levites are in on the attempted rebellion and they try and sound noble when they accuse Moses of hogging the priesthood. They are attempting to both overthrow Moses and the Aaronic priesthood, likely in the hopes of negotiating a new deal with G-d, whom they seem to think is somehow being held captive by Moses and his supporters. Moses cannot call on the Levites to help him deal with this uprising, because 250 of them are among the leaders trying to depose him.

They are joined by three households of Reubenites (Dathan, Abiram and On). After the initial mention of the Reubenite rebels' leaders, the household of On is no longer mentioned, either because this household repented, or it may have been closely related to the other two and no further mention was deemed necessary.

Moses then calls the rebels to an incense contest. The Reubenites refuse to participate and say that Moses has turned words on their heads and has not led them into a land of milk and honey and now wants to take them back into the wilderness. They may have been maneuvering to take possession of the ark and have it proceed them into the land, which they may have thought would insure their victory.

They fail to mention that when they were called to go into the land in the first place, they refused and now, when they were told to go back into the wilderness, they also refuse and are trying their best to arrange for a second attempt at entering the land. The Reubenites stand at the entrance of their tents and Moses instructs the people to move away from them. He says if they die a regular death, he is wrong and YHVH did not send him.

Moses pleads again for the lives of the people who have gathered in support of the rebels in order to see which side will win. He stands at the entrance to the tent of meeting with the Aaronites, while 250 Levites stand just beyond them, effectively blocking any further access to the tent of meeting – so that no one could mount a rescue mission for Moses and his crew.

Two things happen in quick succession. First, the ground opens up under the rebels and swallows them completely, not even leaving a pit to show where they once camped. Then fire came out of the tent of meeting and killed the 250 incense waving, rebel Levites. Moses orders that their incense holders be beaten into a metal cover for the altar of incense as a warning to future generations that only the descendants of Aaron are to enter the holy place to offer incense. The people are then warned not to try and swarm the tent of meeting, because, indeed, Moses and Aaron do indeed speak for G-d and have not been mistaken in the verdict which was given.

The rest of the people who were standing by to watch which side won, now accuse Moses and Aaron of murder and swarm the tent of meeting to take possession of it away from Moses and the Aaronites. The rebellious people are now again in danger of annihilation as a plague breaks out in their midst and likely began to kill those who were closest to the tent of meeting.

Aaron rushes to fill his incense burner and begins to make atonement for the people, by moving between the dead and the living. It was kind of like a wall of smoke to keep the living from dying along side those who had already perished. The plague stopped and the people backed off and never made another attempt to seize control of the tent of meeting, or to try to take the leadership away from Moses and the priesthood away from Aaron's family.

They now accepted the verdict of G-d because they saw how people who challenged G-d met with such horrible deaths. There were actually four separate, related rebellions. First the ten spies talked the people out of going into the Promised Land. When the people were told they were going to head back into the wilderness, the people again rebelled and foolishly charged into Canaan and were slaughtered by their enemies.

Next, 250 Levites tried to take the priesthood away from Aaron and the leadership away from Moses. They were supported by three households of Reuben who might have been ready to force the camp to accept the new leadership. When this also failed and the perpetrators died, those of the people who had gathered in support of the rebels made one final ditch attempt to gain possession of the ark and have it lead them into the Promised Land. They failed.

A considerable number of people perished during these attempted rebellions but there was no more organized resistance to either the leadership of Moses or to the verdict of YHVH. Sometimes it takes a while to weed out those who want to stand in opposition to G-d's Word, but the L-rd is very capable of taking care of Himself and defending the integrity of His Word.

The prophetic portion deals with the people crying out for a King and Saul being anointed as the chosen king. After Saul is first anointed, he leads the people to a massive victory over the Ammonites who have come to reclaim land that once belonged to them. They are not going to slaughter the Jews, they are just going to cut out one of their eyes, thus making them slaves with no hope of deliverance. Saul gives them a crushing defeat and Samuel warns the people not to defy the Word of G-d. They wrongly demanded a leader and the sign of unseasonable rain demonstrated the anger of G-d. They are told if they obeyed G-d and made no more foolish requests, they and their king would not perish.

The New Testament portion is the sad story of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the Holy Spirit. Jews who lived in the Jerusalem area sold property to help cover the living expenses of those Jews from distant lands who wanted to stay in Jerusalem and be trained. They were not told they had to sell everything, but Ananias and Sapphira wanted to give the impression that they were more generous than they really were. After their lie, each of them was given a chance to repent, but they persisted in their lie and were struck dead because of it.

If they had told the truth or repented of their lie before it was too late, they would have lived. I bet nobody else in the community tried to cheat G-d and make up similar lies. We need to be truth speakers and need to confess our faults when we stumble and not try to cover our tracks by persisting in a lie.

Sermon: What Kind of Soil Are You?

Passage: *Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of G-d. The ones on the path (by the way side), are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the Word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the Word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of temptation fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares, the riches and the pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are those who, when they hear the Word, hold it fast with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.” Luke 8:11-15.*

Some people believe that before the foundation of the universe, G-d arbitrarily divided humanity into two categories: goats and sheep. By this way of thinking, at birth you are either a goat or a sheep. There is nothing that a goat can do to obtain salvation and there is nothing a sheep can do to avoid salvation.

If we accept this perspective, your eternal destiny was decided before the foundation of time and there is nothing you can do to change this. I do not subscribe to this weird doctrine. Before the foundation of time, G-d ordained that we should all be born with the ability to choose and to respond (Genesis 4:6,7). In the final analysis, G-d knows who will choose life and who will seek death, but he does not share this information with us.

He actually invites all of mankind to come to salvation, either through direct contact with the Gospel or by His Spirit working in people through the copy of the Law which is inscribed on everyone's heart (Romans 2:14,15). No matter where someone is, G-d is at work in their lives, drawing them closer in when they make spiritual choices, or calling out to them when they make carnal choices.

Today's passage describes both the redemptive activity of G-d, who is the sower and the various reactions of the various kinds of soil. When I came to faith as a confused 19 year old, I reached out and quite a few of my friends tentatively followed me into the Gospel. As well, over the years I have also seen droves of people come to faith and it is continuing to happen. Sadly, I have also seen too many people succumb to one or more of the poor soil reactions as they slip back into the darkness out of which they have been delivered.

As I have seen this happen, I have always wanted to be an influence for salt and light in people's lives – both among believers and also among the flagrant pagans we live among. I do not think I am smarter or better than those who backslide, nor do I think that somehow G-d has given me an easier time than He gave them. Its all a matter of choices.

Years ago, the singer Pat Boone produced a children's cassette called Antsylvania and the theme of this Christian fantasy was that you win or lose by the way you choose. I have sometimes made bad choices, but I have more frequently made good choices, and have taken the time and made the effort to recover from my bad choices. I have also encountered any number of trials, betrayals and heart breaks (2 Corin. 11:22-33), because while walking with the L-rd is the most amazing experience possible, it is never easy (2 Tim. 3:12).

There will always be lots of spiritual resistance, both from the horrible threesome (the flesh, the

world and the enemy) and from other believers who would rejoice at our downfall. In the heights and in the depths, we should always want to respond with the godly strategies outlined in His Word, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

During the Covid crisis we are all facing added challenges, both emotional and financial. If we respond from a heart filled with His Word and with His Spirit, we will not suffer any substantial loss in the things which really matter. Authentic spiritual success comes from maintaining good biblical habits and attitudes as we wander through this life on our way home.

There are three categories of bad soil reactions which I want to explore with you today and the third one has three sub categories, but more about that later.

When the seed is sown on the path or by the wayside, the enemy comes and removes it, lest those who hear the message come to saving faith. Some who still call themselves believers had had their seed removed and they are not even aware of it. I place liberal Christians who no longer believe in the Bible in this category. Have you ever heard of theistic evolution? This silliness is the official position of the Catholic church. It teaches that the six days of active creation are really geological ages of great length where evolution occurred under divine guidance. This is not at all how it happened.

However, any departure from a belief in the biblical record causes the seed of the Word to be eaten up and removed. Supporting immoral positions which the Bible condemns also means that the seed of G-d's Word is removed by the enemy.

Now, I want to pause here make a clarification. While I do not support evolution or any of the forms of criminal immorality which are now protected by Law in our society, I would never call for violence against those who are deceived by them. I also have a strong theological aversion to Islam, but I have met any number of nice muslims who are both good citizens and good neighbours. I do not hate them and I would never want to harm them. I also have several homosexual friends who know my position on their criminal immorality, but we remain friends and they know I would never promote violence against them.

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual to be used to cast down fortresses (2 Corin. 10:4,5) and to rescue these unfortunate victims from whatever form of spiritual delusion they have become trapped in. I want to help them and I would never want to harm them. Promoting hatred and violence against anyone or against any group is forbidden by the Bible. I support the rule of Law and agree that law breakers should be punished, but we should never take the Law into our own hands like those deceived criminal anarchists.

Back to the parable. The enemy wants to destroy both our theology and our spirituality and replace them with both criminal idolatry (which evolution is a form of) and criminal immorality, (which is what our society is promoting). Most in our modern society have abandoned a creationist view of origins and have also jettisoned most of what the Bible teaches about morality. The precious seed of G-d's Word is under greater attack today than at any time on the long history of our world. People concoct weird and illogical mixtures of atheism and myth and are proud to be considered deceived citizens of darkness. This is not our calling and we need to defend and reaffirm our grip of the Bible in our darkening world.

If any of you have questions about any aspect of creation or if you have concerns about any aspect of biblical morality, contact us and we can dialogue. I would even be willing to do face

time with you on Facebook messenger. We could even set up a face time Bible Study until the Covid crisis is finally over. Your grip of eternal realities is the most important thing about you. Is your grip deepening or loosening? I have been engaged in 48 years of serious Bible Study and I am still digging. How about you? I do not mean just repeating verses and reminding yourself about you already believe. I mean challenging what you may have been taught and making sure that the house of your personal faith is firmly rooted in and fixed on the rock of His Word. Any residual hay, wood or stubble you may have picked up will only be burned when we stand before the final judgment of our blessed Messiah (1 Corin. 3:10-15).

The next kind of poor soil reaction concerns spiritual rootlessness that far too easily succumbs to temptation of any kind. They believe alright, but they are never really able to get their lives together. We will all face temptation of many kinds (1 Corin. 10:13) – they are like hidden snares which try to trap us when we least expect it. Well, what constitutes a temptation?

Temptation is anything which motivates you to violate your biblically based conscience and commit an act which you know is wrong. It could be as mild as petty theft or as wild as murderous anger. It could be sexual. It could even be coveting or gossiping. You cannot stand in the faith if you are walking in the darkness of the flesh and are regularly violating your conscience.

In my day, I have had people try to seduce me, rob me and who also wanted to involve me in schemes which I knew were not ethical. How good are you at resisting temptation and not letting it ravage and ruin your life? Is your life a fortress in the L-rd or is it a fortress in the flesh? Do you have habits which regularly defeat you? However, it is one thing to be defeated and it is quite another to give up all together. There are things we may struggle with unsuccessfully for years, but even in defeat, we should never give up.

Running from your enemy or being occupied by your enemy is never the same as going over and joining the enemy. I have known drug addicts and alcoholics who have struggled unsuccessfully for years but who have never given up. The L-rd who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4). As well, greater is the One who is in you than the flesh which wants to ruin your life. All of us are in constant danger of stumbling and falling, but how many times you fall is not important, what matters is how many times you get back up and climb back into the arena (Prov. 24:16). It is my constant prayer that all of us grow to the place where our spiritual armour is not full of gaps that bring defeat, but is full of strength which brings us victory, time and time again (Ps. 37:23)

Now lets deal with the three carnal subcategories among the weeds of the world. Once we have defeated our doubts and crucified our flesh, life throws us three pernicious curve balls which want to cause us to suffer a major spiritual shut down.

I know people who are constantly terrified because they have let the world convince them that the worst case scenario will always happen to them. They are afraid all the time that they will lose their job, their home, their car or their career. As we grow in the Messiah, these kinds of worries should lessen as we trust Him with all the major and minor details of our life. Living under the oppression of the morbid eventuality is no way to live.

He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5) and the righteous will never have to beg for their bread (Ps. 37:25), unless the whole society is starving or we are all locked up in a prison camp. Even then, He will meet our needs and if things ever get too rough, He will just take us

home. Worrying is fantasizing about failure when we should be trusting in the L-rd. Fear the L-rd and not all the whatever's life throws at you.

Next comes the false riches of this fading age. Our modern world has generated more personal wealth than at any other time in human history and societies are getting richer and not poorer. We will always have the poor with us, but access to riches and upward financial mobility is still on the rise. You see, money is not the root of all evil, but the love of money is (1Tim. 6:10). You cannot serve G-d and mammon (Matt. 6:24). It is either one or the other.

However, poverty can cause a person's faith to choke just as much as the love of riches. If riches drive you or if poverty controls you, you have no room and no time to collect the true riches of the coming Kingdom. Rich people need to be generous and not make getting ever richer the focus of their life. Poor people need to be content and allow the more fortunate to help the less fortunate meet their needs. Feeding the poor should be one of the greatest privileges of the rich. Everything we own really belongs to G-d. How we exercise this temporary stewardship will determine whether our riches are choking our faith or not.

Riches are not a sin and poverty is not a virtue, but dedicating our resources to the coming Kingdom is the best use we can make of our financial resources. Death will overtake us all and when all that we own passes on to someone else, what does that leave us with? Materialism is a growing problem in our world and too many believers sacrifice their happiness and contentment to the pursuit of riches because, as hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of man are never satisfied (Prov. 27:20). How lightly are you holding on to your riches? What good spiritual things are they crowding out of your life? Financial success is a valid objective but it should always take second place to spiritual success. We need to be content, not greedy. We need to be cultivating the fruit of the Spirit, not grabbing as much of this world's fading treasures as we can.

Lets move on to talk about the choking pleasures of this world which come in so many different shapes and sizes. There is so much to enjoy in our world, from smelling the first blooms of spring to drinking a cold glass of water on a hot summer day. But the satisfaction offered by the world is both temporary and not really spiritually satisfying. I love art and music and I appreciate both good literature and quality movies – and there is so much that is incredible on line! But none of it has the ability to really touch us deeply in our souls.

Many unfortunate people who have not begun to explore the wonders of biblical spirituality are like a bunch of blind people trying to experience light. They are really zombies living for the shallow, temporary pleasures of this life, while they ignore the amazing things of the world to come. At best they are constantly distracted, but they are never really satisfied.

As well, too many believers are so much into the pleasures of this life that they really have no time for the things of the world to come. Having fun and experiencing the finer things of the world is not wrong in itself. Even enjoying loud music and fine wine is not a sin. But one day all the incredible architecture around the world will crumble and all the amazing works of art will go up in flames. This world is not our home and we should not become too attached to its pleasures. We need to be focused on the treasures of the world to come.

We should always let talented people enrich our lives and it is not wrong to take pleasure in things which are not overtly sinful. But we should never let the things of the world get too big a grip on our hearts and lives. They should pale in comparison to the glory which will someday

be revealed for us. What is your life focused on?

If we allow our souls to become choked, our spirituality will sink into a coma from which too many believers will not awake in this life. The parable is a stern warning to believers to cultivate good soil reactions and to avoid bad soil reactions.

The Parable ends with is another kind of soil reaction which we are encouraged to cultivate. It is described as receiving the Word with an honest, good heart and retaining it and bearing fruit with patience and perseverance. By this we understand that the good soil reaction has overcome doubt and temptation and refuses to be choked by the cares, the riches and the pleasures of life. There are always too many spiritual casualties and the Messiah is warning us about the nature of the battle which each of us will have to face.

There is no way of ignoring or avoiding these challenges, and no one is stuck and only able to generate one kind of soil reaction. People are goats and sheep by choice and not by some arbitrary decision which was made for them before the foundation of the world. G-d is always reaching out and people are always responding. Some are deceiving themselves and succumbing to the lies and deceptions of the enemy.

In order to defeat temptation, we need to develop deep roots into the truths of His Word. It doesn't matter how long you have been walking with the Messiah, it only matters what kind of soil reaction you are allowing to develop in your heart and life. I have known spiritual leaders who have let themselves become choked by the snares of this life because of the bad choices they have made.

In our Messiah, we never have to be cornered because His grace will always be more than sufficient for us at every stage of our lives as we walk with Him. We need to keep our spirituality under constant scrutiny so that we are never overcome by doubt, by temptation or by the snares of this life. We need to surrender whatever we encounter to Him and even in the strangest of circumstances, our Good Shepherd will always make sure that we overcome and keep on grazing in the green pastures He will always lead us to.

Focus on Him and His Word and not on the storms of life which too often come howling through our lives. Search for His way of escape and develop good soil reactions and your spiritual success will glorify the name of the one whose voice we should always listen to, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Shabbat shalom and have a good week. Don't forget that our first face to face service will occur next Saturday, July 4th at 11 am. We will guide through the new procedures and it will be good to see you all. We will still be live streaming the service for those who may not feel they are ready to return to in person services. Thank you for your tithes and offerings – lets keep the shul in good financial shape as we blaze through the summer towards the fall and the High Holy Days and Sukkoth.

Blessings.