

Parashat Korach

‘Thou art Simon, thou shalt be called Cephas.’ The Lord writes the new name on those places only in our lives where He has erased pride, self-sufficiency, rebellion, and self-interest. Some of us, like Korach, have the new name in spots only, like spiritual measles. In parts we look OK. When we are cloaked in our high spiritual mood, you would think we were top of the range, highly-toned saints. But, don’t look at us when we are not in that mood. A true disciple has the new name, of Messiah within, written all over. Self-interest, pride, pomposity, rebellion, et al, have been erased. Korach, as we shall see, made his love of the Lord conditional. Make no conditions, let Yeshua be everything, and He will guide you home not just for earthly days but for eternity.

The Levite Korach rose up against Moses & Aaron, along with three Reubenites - Dathan, Abiram, and On. Additionally, 250 community leaders and council members joined the renegades. These rebel-rousers said, “You’ve gone too far. The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why do you set yourself up above them?” Moses was appalled and fell face down before God. He then told the group that on the morrow the Lord would show who was holy and who belongs to Him. “You, Korach, and all your followers, take your fire-pans and on the morrow put fire and incense in them before the Lord. You Levites have gone too far!” Moses continued, “Isn’t it enough that God has separated you Levites from the rest of the people, so as to do His work in the Tabernacle? Now you’re trying to get the priesthood as well. You have banded against your God.”

It is obvious what Korach wanted - the priesthood. He was a malcontent, a disruptive dissenter. An envious, jealous man, who coveted a leadership that was not his by divine gift, but had been God-given to Moses & Aaron. Korach and his band of followers had ministry but he hungered for priesthood-leadership. Such people are a menace, especially when they encourage others to rebel. They disrupt communities in all walks of life. Korach’s argument was based on God’s declaration in Exodus 19:6, “The nation of Israel shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This is the age-old argument of the “royal priesthood.” Now, it is true that God had declared such but it did not infer that every Israelite was eligible for the God-given function of priesthood. It was God who had said to Moses, “Take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel that he may minister unto Me.” Moses did not do it on his own volition, but of God’s. The faithful were not free to do as they liked. In any community, one ends up with so many people and so many opinions; leading to chaos.

“Jealousy,” says Proverbs 6:34, “enrages a man.” Swindoll, in an article on the subject, puts it bluntly and succinctly, “Like an anger-blinded, half-starved rat prowling in the foul-smelling sewers below street level, so is the person caged within the suffocating radius of selfish jealousy. Trapped by resentment and diseased by rage, that person feeds on the filth of their own imagination.” Such dissent endangers the cohesion of the social group. Religion is, in my view, fundamentally social, a mode of organising the faithful into a supernatural community

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by reason of shared convictions, attitudes, and actions. God-given leadership may not be overthrown and usurped at the drop of a hat. Unreasonable usurption causes chaos to community cohesion and its faith tenets.

Moses then summoned Dathan & Abiram to him but they refused. They said, "No. You brought us from a land of milk and honey to kill us in the desert. And now you want to lord it over us! Moreover, we haven't exactly gotten into the land of milk & honey you promised us. We've no fields and no vineyards." Moses was rightly 'steaming-mad'. He goes back to Korach and re-iterates that the whole bunch of malcontents be outside the Tent of Meeting on the morrow - fire-pans and incense at the ready. They did this. Suddenly, the glory of the Lord appeared before the whole assembly. He ordered Moses & Aaron to get out of the way, for He was going to destroy the whole assembly. Both men fell face down and appealed for leniency for the people, many of whom were not rebellious. The Lord said, "Tell the assembly to move clear of the tents of Korach, Nathan, and Abiram." Meanwhile, the families of the named men came out to stand by their tent-entrances. Moses then addressed the whole assembly. Words to the effect that if the renegades lived on, then he, Moses, was not sent by the Lord. If, however, the earth opened and swallowed them up, then the assembly would know that the rebellious had treated God with utter contempt. Torah then goes on to say, "As soon as he had finished speaking, the ground under them split apart, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korach's men and all their possessions....They perished and were gone. At their cries all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, 'the earth is going to swallow us too!'" Panic ran rife.

Astonishingly, scripture says that the very next day the assembly gathered in front of the Tent of Meeting, grumbling again against Moses & Aaron. "You have killed the Lord's people," they said. God's glory appeared and God ordered Moses & Aaron to 'back-off' once more. He, God, was intent on destroying the whole disobedient assembly. Hurriedly, Moses told Aaron to collect censer, fire, and incense and, before that assembly, make atonement for the continued sinning of the people. Aaron did this but it was too late for the 14,700 Israelites struck down by a rampaging viciously contagious plague. Then God stopped the plague.

Rebellion not only endangered Moses'/Aaron's legitimate authority but also God's divine authority. This rebellion threatened to undermine His divine project of re-establishing the order and blessing of Creation over all the earth. It would have undermined the entire purpose of the Exodus from Egypt, if allowed to continue.

Therefore, the plague is not the end of this fascinating story. The Lord told Moses to take 12 staffs from each leader of the 12 tribes. Their names were writ large on the staffs. The Levite staff had Aaron's name on it. The staffs were placed in the Tent of Meeting, in front of the Testimony where God met with Moses. On the morrow, Moses went to the Tent of Testimony. Aaron's Levite staff had sprouted but also, budded, blossomed, and produced almonds! The staffs were shown to the assembly. It shut them up. The Lord said to Moses,

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“Put Aaron’s staff back, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put paid to the moans and groans against Me, so that they will not die.” The Israelites said to Moses, “We shall die! We are all lost, we are all lost.....!” There were no rebellions after that. Well, not for some time.

Today, of course, the earth does not open its mouth to swallow those who defy divine revelation and the supernatural elements in it. If it did, most of the human race would be swallowed. I like to see the rod of Aaron that blossomed as a beautiful symbol of Messiah Yeshua. Just as that staff came to life by a supernatural act of God, who raises the dead, so confirmation was given to the High Priestly Messiahship of Yeshua by a supernatural act of God, who raised Him from the dead. Eventually, Israel will come to realise that in Yeshua’s hand is the key to peace, security, and life - and the glorious eternal promise.