

Reckless Abandon

This weeks reading is from Parashat Korach (*Bamidbar / Numbers 16:1-18:32*), Korach, Datan, and Aviram rose up and assembled themselves against Moshe and against Aaron and questioned whether their role as priests was really the will of God. Two hundred and fifty men went to offer incense by fire before the Lord. As a result, the 250 men died by fire that proceeded from the Lord because of their sin. After these things, the Children of Israel complained against Moshe and Aaron and a plague broke out in their midst. Moshe told Aaron to take a censor filled with burning incense and stand in the gap between the dead and the living. The peoples response over the death of Korach, Datan, and Aviram is recorded in *Bamidbar / Numbers 16:41*. The text this week reminds us that rebellion and having a rebellious spirit before the Lord is certain death. All forms of rebellion result in sin before the Lord especially those of the thoughts of our hearts. Let's discuss this a little further.

שדוקה יבתח / The Holy Scriptures

ספר במדבר פרק יד

ג וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב-לָכֶם כִּי כָל-הָעֵדָה כָּלָם קִדְּשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם יְהוָה וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל-קְהַל יְהוָה: ד וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל-פָּנָיו: ה וַיִּדְבֹר אֶל-קְרַח וְאֶל-כָּל-עֵדְתוֹ לֵאמֹר בִּקְרַח וַיִּדַע יְהוָה אֶת-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ וְאֶת-הַקְּדוֹשׁ וְהַקְּרִיב אֵלָיו וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר-בוֹ יִקְרִיב אֵלָיו: ו זֹאת עֲשׂוּ קַחוּ-לָכֶם מִחֶתוֹת קְרַח וְכָל-עֵדְתוֹ: ז וּתְנוּ-בָהֶן | אֵשׁ וְשִׂימוּ עֲלֵיהֶן | קִטְרֵת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה מִחֶר וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה הוּא הַקְּדוֹשׁ רַב-לָכֶם בְּנֵי לֵוִי:

Bamidbar / Numbers 16:3-7

16:3 They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?' 16:4 When Moses heard this, he fell on his face; 16:5 and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, 'Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His, and who is holy, and will bring him near to Himself; even the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself. 16:6 'Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and all your company, 16:7 and put fire in them, and lay incense upon them in the presence of the Lord tomorrow; and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the one who is holy. You have gone far enough, you sons of Levi!' (NASB)

At the beginning of Parashat Korach we read in *Bamidbar / Numbers 16:1* Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, 16:2 and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. (NASB) The Scriptures say there were 250 leaders chosen in the assembly of people to represent the people before God. Moshe then tells Korah and these men what they should do ...take censers for yourselves, Korah and all your company, 16:7 and put fire in them, and lay incense upon them in the presence of the Lord tomorrow; and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the one who is holy. Have you ever wondered where these 250 men got their censers? Where did they get their incense? And where did they get their fire? Did they enter into the Tabernacle to obtain these things? According to the Torah, the only ones who were qualified, anointed, and consecrated for service in atonement before the Lord was Aaron and his sons. Consequently, there would have only been a few censers manufactured during the construction of the tabernacle. In addition to this, the incense that is burned before the Lord is only for use in the tabernacle according to *Shemot / Exodus 30:37* 'The incense which you shall make, you shall not make in the same proportions for yourselves; it shall be holy to you for the Lord. 30:38 'Whoever shall make any like it, to use as perfume, shall be cut off from his people.' (NASB) Similarly, the fire that is used when burning incense is to be taken from the altar according to *Vayikra / Leviticus 16:12* "He shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. (NASB) (see also *Revelation 8:5*) Note that if these men were in fact to take part in the service before the Lord, there would not have been a need for 250 censers since only one could perform his service at a given time. As best that can be determined, these 250 men made their own censers, they made their own incense, and they made their own fire, and went before the Lord expecting Him to accept their version of the Torah command. They went with "reckless abandon" doing and saying these things without regards for the consequences of disobeying God's clear command. Do you think that this happens today? The hearts desire of Korach and the people was to serve in the Tabernacle like Moshe and Aaron. King David said in *Tehillim / Psalms 20:4* May He grant you your heart's desire And fulfill all your counsel! (NASB) Many of the books of the prophets in the Scriptures speak out against those Israelites who brought forth sacrifices but did not act (in their lives and in their hearts) in accord with the precepts of the Torah. The Prophets say that sacrifices were of little worth without a truly repentant heart and a determination to turn from sin and return to God striving after righteousness. (*Hosea 14:1-2, Joel 2:13, Micah 6:6-8*). Korach and the people failed to understand that a truly repentant person seeks the Lord God Almighty for change from the inside-out producing a new lifestyle and by the power of the Holy Spirit a modified way of thinking so that we begin to think and act in a righteous manner. If our outward lives and our inward thoughts are righteous, our heart will not have desires rooted in sin like Korach and his men. It is only by the help of Christ and the indwelling Spirit that we can hope to live righteously before the Lord Today. The story of Korach should remind us that our call to service before the Lord is not with "reckless abandon" but with humbleness of heart and a deep respect for His great name.