

The sons of Korah

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Numbers 16 verse 1, Now Korah the son of Ishar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathom and Abiram, the sons of Eliab and On, the son of Pilith, sons of Reuben, took men and rose up before Moses with certain of the children of Israel, 250 princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown.

And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them, wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord.

When Moses heard it, he fell upon his face. And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the Lord will show who [00:01:05] are his, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near unto him. Even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. Moses do, take you censers, Korah, and all his company, and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow. And it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy, ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.

And Moses said unto Korah, Here I pray you, ye sons of Levi, seemeth it but a small thing unto you that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before [00:02:01] the congregation to minister unto them. And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren, the sons of Levi, with thee, and seek ye the priesthood also.

For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord? And what is Aaron that ye murmur against him?

Verse 23, And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. [00:03:06] So they got up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram on every side. And Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die, the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up, with all that

appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit, then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord. [00:04:03] And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them. And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them, for they said, lest the earth swallow us up also.

And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

Chapter 26, verse 9, beginning to read the second sentence.

[00:05:10] Verse 9, about halfway through. This is that Dathan and Abiram which were famous in the congregation who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah. And they strove against the Lord. And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah. When that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men, and they became a sign.

Notwithstanding, the children of Korah died not.

You probably think, dear friends, that you've had read to you tonight, this afternoon, a [00:06:02] very solemn chapter, but in the last verse that was read to you, we have compressed within the compass of a few words, one of the greatest triumphs of the grace of God. Never notwithstanding, it says, the children of Korah died not.

When this arrogant and proud man, Korah, rose up in rebellion against Jehovah, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up Korah and his company, at that very time, the hand of God was stretched out in mercy and he snatched the sons of Korah as brands from the burning.

It's a remarkable incident and a great encouragement to us, because we can see if we think closely [00:07:13] that here is a remarkable triumph of the grace of God, where God had said previously that he would bring the sins of the fathers upon the children and to the third and fourth generation, yet God, in the midst of this appalling act of judgment, he remembered mercy and the sons of Korah died not. And so they become an example of believers today, because not only were they spared from judgment but they were entrusted with many privileges and established in the biblical [00:08:05] service for Jehovah, and so they become typical of believers today.

And you and I, we can remember how the Lord has saved us, praise be his name, his eye has been upon Christ and though we deserve to be cast into the pit, blessed God has had his eye upon Christ and he has said, now deliver him from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom.

And God has taken us up in wondrous blessing and has given us many precious privileges that I wish to draw your attention to in the course of my remarks this afternoon. But you must allow me just a few words on the 16th chapter, solemn as that chapter is.

[00:09:11] Now Korah, I say, was a man who was arrogant, was proud and was discontented with the many privileges that God had given to him. He was given a place of privilege and honor to minister

before the Lord in the sanctuary of God but he wanted something else.

He looked at Moses and Aaron and he thought, I want to be like them. And so he grasped at those privileges that God had given to others and not to himself. And there is a lesson on the surface of things, beloved friends, that we must challenge ourselves [00:10:01] that are we content with the portion, with the office, with the work, the service that the Lord has graciously given to us.

Well, this chapter is very solemn because of its typical character.

If you think of the sin of Korah for a moment, you will see that he was seeking to display Moses and Aaron. Now Moses, we know, was the apostle of the Jewish profession as Aaron was its high priest.

So typically, this sin of Korah sets forth the rebellion of man, the apostasy of man against the place that God has given to him, against the person of Christ because that's [00:11:04] what we have in the book of Jude that speaks of the apostasy of later days. Woe unto them, he says, for they have gone in the way of Cain and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward and perished in the gainsaying of Korah. Now in one striking sentence, we have brought together the three things, we may say, the whole course of Christendom is spread before us, the way of Cain, the way of natural religion that saw no need for the atoning sacrifice, man's natural religion. And then we have the error of Balaam, the spirit of seduction and corruption that we see all around us today.

[00:12:01] And finally, the full climax of man's apostasy in the gainsaying of Korah.

And you don't need words from me to suggest to you that this is the course of things today. The way of Cain, the error of Balaam and the gainsaying of Korah is heading up to that insurrection, that open rebellion against the rights of Christ in this world. And God is going to bring swift judgment upon it as he did upon this expression of that rebellion in the time of Korah. But against that dark background, how the wondrous grace of God shines out. To think that God could select those men, those children, we don't know how old they were, about the sons of Korah, that he could rescue them and save them from this appalling [00:13:09] judgment that would engulf that presumptuous, rebellious family.

Now I would like to trace the history of the sons of Korah.

You know that perhaps eleven or is it a dozen psalms are ascribed to the sons of Korah and very precious psalms they are.

The 45th and the 84th are outstanding for the wonderful spirit of devotion to Jehovah that they breathe. And when we think that the sons of Korah owe their very existence, their preservation from judgment to the sovereign mercy of God, well it's no wonder that those psalms are [00:14:04] among the sweetest in the book.

Well now the first mention of the sons of Korah historically is in the first of Chronicles chapter 6 and verse 54.

There we find that the sons of Korah as part of the family of Koath were given the cities of refuge of which Hebron is mentioned first.

Hebron speaks of communion and fellowship and how the sons of Korah enjoyed that special place

of privilege, of communion, of fellowship. It was the place associated with Abraham where he set up his altar and his tent and who enjoyed a fellowship with Jehovah as Abraham did.

[00:15:06] And beloved friend, what a place of privilege and fellowship is ours. Saved from the pit, we are given the place of Abraham, yea, the place of full communion with our blessed Saviour and Lord. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. And at Hebron it was in the 18th of Genesis where we find Abraham entertaining the heavenly visitors.

He was enjoying, as one writer has put it, Macintosh I believe, he was enjoying full fellowship with the Lord, providing refreshment for the Lord also and interceding for others.

Well now there are three special privileges, belong to Abraham but they can be yours and [00:16:07] they can be mine because God has given us this wondrous place, this place of nearness to Himself. He hasn't set us at a distance, He's brought us near to Himself. And now we'll pass on to the 9th chapter.

We have the place of privilege of the sons of Korah, their special office, their stewardship. In the 9th chapter, beginning at verse 19, we read about the son of Korah but we won't linger long there. We pick out verse 26, four chief porters are mentioned in their set office that were over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God. [00:17:04] And again, verse 29, some of them also were appointed to oversee the vessels and all the instruments of the sanctuary and the fine flour and the wine and the oil and the frankincense and the spices.

Now you don't need me to tell you that these spices, this frankincense and later on the things that were made in the pans, verse 31, they are all suggestive of the person of Christ and the perfections of Christ are brought before us.

And the sons of Korah were entrusted with this wondrous stewardship.

[00:18:01] And you and I, as the saved sons of Korah today, we are brought into the enjoyment of these things and they are made good to us by the sovereign grace of God, all speaking to us of the adorable person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These things that were made in the pans as has been interpreted to us by others, it was a reminder of the meal offering where these sons of Korah, these Levites, they were given the privilege of watching over the baking of these things that bring before us so clearly the perfection of the Lord Jesus in his pathway here. [00:19:05] Because the meal offering speaks of his humanity, of his lowliness and the things that were baked in the pans, it was the flat cakes, we might call them pancakes today, they were exposed to the trial of the fire and the perfection was thus brought out. And when we think of the Lord Jesus Christ in his pathway, the trials that came upon him, the suffering that he endured, the scorn, the mocking and the pressure of things from without, how it brought out the fragrance of his life, of the perfection of his walk, of his beauty and all that was of such delight to the heart of God, it was the frankincense [00:20:05] that belonged to God and he could appreciate the wondrous perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And beloved friend, I wonder if this one is precious to you and to us who believe he indeed is precious and the more we think of what he's done for us, how he's rescued us and brought us to himself, then we should realize increasingly and as we trace his pathway through the Gospels, we should realize increasingly what a saviour he is, how perfect in the greatest and most intensive trials, how his glory, his moral glory shines out.

And here we didn't mention perhaps that the sons of Gorah were made keepers of the gates. [00:21:08] They became doorkeepers. It was an office that they treasured and valued because it was given to them of God. And in the 84th Psalm, you remember, the word is, I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness. Why was that? Because as a doorkeeper, they were near to the place where Jehovah was. They could gaze into the beauty of that sanctuary. It was theirs. They were near to it and they rejoiced in their privileges. Now dear friends, we are brought into the very intimacy of the presence of God through our Lord Jesus Christ and we are brought to know the wondrous blessing of being near to [00:22:11] him, the one who has died for us and the one who now loves to gather us around himself. But we'll have more to say on this a little later perhaps.

But this was a wonderful service that was entrusted to the sons of Gorah, the care of all these things that speak to us of our spiritual blessing. And you may say, well, they required strength for this. They required power. That is true. But the power was given to them of God. But before we leave this chapter, let us just notice this. In verse 33, there were the singers among these sons of Gorah, the singers.

[00:23:09] And they were employed in that work day and night.

And not only have we the privilege of being identified with our Lord Jesus Christ, but we have a new song put into our hearts as Hebrews 13 would remind us, a new song. And there we have the message given to us, the exhortation, by him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Who so competent to sing spiritually as those that have been redeemed at such a cost. [00:24:05] These sons of Gorah knew from whence they had been called and rescued. And this song of praise filled their lips. And as they journeyed across the wilderness in the spirit of the 84 Psalm, as they went up to Jerusalem to be found in the Lord's presence, to see the beauty of the Lord in his temple or tabernacle, their hearts were filled with praise. And the trials and difficulties of the journey, trying as they were, were forgotten. Their hearts were filled with the praise of Jehovah. Well let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.

Now I said earlier that such a service and privilege would require much strength.

[00:25:11] It requires a strength, a power, outside of ourselves. And if we just turn to the 26th chapter of Chronicles, what do we read? The 26th chapter of Chronicles, speaking of the Korites mentioned in the first verse, the chapter, we read this in verse 6, they were mighty men of valor.

And again, verse 8, they and their sons and their brethren were able men for strength for the servers.

Yes, God gives us the strength for his servers.

[00:26:03] He calls us into his servers. The risen Lord is the one who gives us some little service that we can render to him and he gives us the strength. Maybe we find the trials tedious to us, we find the burden of service often weighing us down, so little perhaps to encourage and lift up, but in the midst of it all, we know that he is with us and our eye is upon him and he gives us the strength.

Our brother reminded us in our prayer this afternoon, a few minutes ago, in the little room where we were gathered together, that my strength is made perfect in weakness and weak in ourselves.

[00:27:02] Weakness itself, as weak as water spilt upon the ground as we may be, yet the Lord can use us if our eye is upon him and if we count upon him for the strength and the wisdom that we need for the service that he has entrusted to us.

Now in chapter 23 of the second book, we have something further about the sons of Korah.

The 23rd chapter of the second book of Korah, we have the story of the wicked usurper Athaliah who had taken charge of the kingdom and the true king was hidden away, unknown, and yet [00:28:09] there are Korites mentioned, porters, the doorkeepers, in verse 4 of our chapter and they had the great privilege of becoming royal guards, so to speak, of the hidden king.

What a privilege that was. But we really need to compare this chapter with the parallel passage in the second book of Kings and there you will find that the faithful Jehoiada, he went out and he gathered in trusted men and he showed them the king's son and that seemed to fire them with the [00:29:01] great resolve to go out as we find here in our chapter, they went about in Judah and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah and the chief of the fathers of Israel and they came to Jerusalem and they made known to them that behold, the king's son shall reign as the Lord has said of the sons of David.

Well now, these men had the privilege of bearing their testimony to the coming king. They were gathered together in the temple, they went out to proclaim the message that the king's son would reign and so dear friends, I do feel that there is much encouragement [00:30:01] here for us, that we have this privilege of showing to others that there is one who's coming.

We have seen him by faith as they saw him in person. We go forth in testimony proclaiming the message that the one whom men despised, God has glorified and God will, in the day that's coming, set him on his rightful place and all will be brought in suit of objection under him. But there is something else, they were not only these porters or these sons of Korah, these Korites, weren't only to be in charge of the king himself, to be gathered around him to watch over him so to speak, but they were gods also of the foundation as we have [00:31:05] in the fifth chapter, the fifth verse. Now that speaks to me like this, not only are we attached to the person of Christ, but we have special responsibilities of guarding the foundation, I mean foundation truth.

Now this speaks to me like this, the Lord has given to us to hold fast many valuable and important truths, foundation truths we may call them, the inspiration of the scriptures, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's coming, the wonderful glorious truths of the resurrection [00:32:01] and exaltation of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit here on earth, the calling out of the church, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, his guidance and control of the church, and the very gospel itself, all these things are treasures that have been entrusted to us and the word is, hold fast what thou hast that no man take thy crown.

And contend earnestly for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. Now far be it from me to speak disparagingly of fellow believers, but let me put it this way, where among the various companies of believers today in Christendom, would you [00:33:10] find those that make everything of the sufferings of Christ?

They might have their extra service, their communion service attached on to some other meeting, but isn't it a privilege, can't we give thanks to the Lord for it, that we do make it the focal point, don't we, of our worship, the coming together to remember him in his sufferings.

That was suggested really by those men that took charge of the offerings in the pans. In the earlier chapter, the sufferings of Christ meant something to them, they valued [00:34:01] them and we should value it too. And I don't, I'm not ashamed to admit that many times I give thanks to the Lord in prayer that he's shown me the joy of being gathered to the name of his blessed son and given me the privilege of showing forth his death week by week as Lord's days come round. It's a privilege that we all value, I'm sure. If the Lord has brought you to himself, you must value that above all else. So let's take courage and let's enter in to the wondrous privileges that are given to us, but with privilege comes responsibility and I say in a day when the foundations of the truth are being attacked on every hand, we need to contend earnestly for the faith. [00:35:08] We need to lay hold of and hold fast tenaciously that which the Lord has entrusted to us, may it be so. Now in the 31st chapter of the second book again, we have another reference to the sons of Korah.

In verse 14, it speaks about Korah, the son of Imnah, the Levite, the porter toward the east was over the freewill offerings of God to distribute the oblations of the Lord and the most holy things.

Would appear that these offerings, these freewill offerings and oblations, while they were consecrated [00:36:08] to Jehovah as his portion, yet they were transferred, shall we say, by him to the priests and given to them to eat in the most holy place, in the sanctuary of God.

That was the privilege of the priests and this speaks to me of my priestly portion and I would appeal to you, are you, am I, enjoying my priestly portion to the full?

Because not only am I a Levite to serve the Lord, but I am a priest also.

That is, every believer is constituted a priest. What was denied to Korah in his day is given to us now. [00:37:03] A holy priesthood, as Peter tells us, to enter into the holiest with a sacrifice of praise and worship and a royal priest to go out in testimony before the world to represent the one who is coming, our blessed Lord and our Redeemer. But not only is it ours to enjoy the priestly portion that belongs to us, all the precious things of Christ that are made good to us, but also to distribute them. You see, that was their function, to distribute the most holy things.

Well, what do I know about this?

Not only am I called to enjoy the wondrous person of Christ and all his fullness of grace [00:38:06] and all that it means to me to be identified with him and all that he's done for me to enter into it, but is my enjoyment such that it flows out to others?

Am I enjoying Christ in my very soul so that I can't keep it to myself, I must pass on a little of my enjoyment to others so that I distribute my portion. I give portions to those, what does it say in Nehemiah, to those that denied it.

Give to those for whom nothing is prepared, that's it, isn't it? Well, there are those, fellow believers, hidden away perhaps, maybe in many a back street or many on a bed of sickness that we can visit and we can cheer their spirits by passing [00:39:05] on to them some of the precious things of Christ

that we enjoy for ourselves. Do we know anything of this wondrous privilege that is ours?

Now the next and final mention of the sons of Korah, historically, is in the book of Nehemiah chapter 11 and we won't spend long on this but just to notice that the sons of Korah were among those that returned with the remnant of God's people under Ezra and Nehemiah, a day of weakness and decay and confusion.

But they were true to their levitical service, they were represented when that remnant went [00:40:01] back to set up the worship of Jehovah in their own land.

And how it speaks to us, doesn't it, that they valued what God had given them. They were true to him in a day of confusion and of disorder.

And what was of God remained permanent because they accepted their office from the God that had given it to them and they valued it and held it fast. Now in the epistle that speaks to us of the disorder of the present day, the confusion in the world today, in the Church of God outwardly, we read this, Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure.

[00:41:03] The firm foundation of God standeth, it standeth amidst all the disorder of things around us. Now you're going to ask me to define what scripture leaves undefined. But it appears to me like this, there's confusion all around, we don't know which way to turn perhaps in ecclesiastically often, but what is of God remains sure and certain and God would give you the faith to perceive what is of himself in the midst of all that is in decay and disorder under the hands of men. Well now we've traced the history of the sons of Korah but I've omitted two references deliberately really because I'll finish up with these two very briefly. [00:42:03] Now the first of Chronicles chapter 12, you will find that the sons of Korah were present when David was in rejection.

In the twelfth chapter, these are they that came to David to Ziklag when he kept himself close because of Saul and they were among the mighty men helpers of the war. They went out to David in his rejection and verse 6 tells you that they were Korites. And again were they among those, they must have been I think, those men of war that could keep rank at the end of the chapter that came with a perfect heart to Hebron to make David king over all Israel and all the rest also of Israel would have one heart to make David king. [00:43:01] They went out to David to share his rejection. That is our privilege to identify ourselves with our rejected Lord in the day of his rejection. But there's something else and I'll be brief on this. The second chapter of Chronicles, it's chapter 20 and in the day of Jehoshaphat, in the day of battle, we read this.

Verse 20, the Levites in verse 19 are the children of the Kohathites, of the children of the Korites stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a loud voice on high. [00:44:02] Verse 18 and verse 19 are meant to read, well there was a man faced with a terrific battle against his enemies yet he was found bowing himself to the ground in worship before his God. Verse 18, and the Korites stood up to praise the Lord, the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

These are the two great privileges that are open to us in this present day of going forth to share our Lord's rejection in the spirit of Hebrews 13, going forth unto him outside the camp bearing his reproach, remember it's unto him because he's done so much for us, we belong to him, he's redeemed us at such cost, but we go forth with a song of praise [00:45:03] and worship in our hearts and on our lips. And he does value this privilege we have of worship, it's the greatest privilege that is

open to us today, the Father seeketh such to worship him and may it be ours as the sons of Korah in this present day to not only enjoy our privileges as we should, but to respond to our blessed Lord in his rejection and to go forth with praise and worship in our hearts. May it be so for his name's sake.