

Title: **A Bronze Memorial**

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It was a bronze covering made out of hammered plates and it served as a covering for the altar. It was also a memorial, a reminder of a terrible day in Israel's history.

Israel had already refused to follow the advice of spies Joshua and Caleb and enter the promised land to take possession (Numbers 13-14). As a result, God had consigned that generation with the exception of the two spies to wander in the wilderness until they all died.

In Numbers 16, Moses and Aaron were challenged by Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On. Korah was a Levite and the other three men were of the tribe of Reuben. They had gathered a group of 250 men of renown, leaders of the nation. Korah and his companions accused Moses and Aaron of "taking too much upon themselves." They argued that all of the congregation was holy and questioned why Moses and Aaron had exalted themselves above the rest of the congregation!

Moses responded that on the morrow the Lord would choose who was holy and would be permitted to come near to Him. He also instructed Korah and all of his companions to take censers with fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord (16:4-7). It appears that Korah and his brethren wanted the position of the priests. Moses asked Korah if the privilege of serving the tabernacle was a small thing; was he seeking the priesthood also (16:9-10)?

When Moses called for Dathan and Abiram, they would not even come, but instead sent him a message. Incredibly, they claimed that Moses had brought them out of a "land flowing with milk and honey," i.e., Egypt, for the purpose of killing them in the wilderness! And now he was acting "like a prince" over them. Furthermore, they noted that he had not brought them into a "land flowing with milk and honey"!

Even if Egypt was a "land flowing with milk and honey," had these men already forgotten that they had been slaves in Egypt? And why had Moses not brought the nation into the promised land, a "land flowing with milk and honey"? The people had refused to go into the land for fear of the inhabitants!

On the next day, Korah and his companions assembled with their censers, but they had also turned the entire congregation against Moses and Aaron (16:18-19). The Lord's response was to warn Moses and Aaron to get away from the congregation so that He could "consume them in a moment." Amazingly, Moses interceded on behalf of the congregation and God spared them. However, the congregation was warned to "get away from the tents" of the men who were opposing Moses and Aaron. While they stood at the doors of their tents, the earth opened up and swallowed Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their families. They fell alive into the pit and it closed over them. Evidently horrified, the rest of Israel fled "at their cry." Fire also came from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who offered incense in their censers (16:24-35). The impression left is that the bodies of these men were consumed, leaving nothing but the censers they had been holding (16:35-38).

The Lord ordered that Eleazar was to pick up the bronze censers of the men who had died and hammer them into a covering for the altar, a reminder of the presumption of Korah and his companions (17:36-40).

The willful blindness of Dathan and Abiram is hard to imagine. In their minds, the exodus had changed from a rescue to a disaster. They had asked Moses, "Will you put out the eyes of these men?" (16:14). The point of their question was to suggest that Korah and the others could clearly see Moses' failure!

But the train of illogical reasoning had at least one more car. On the day after the death of the challengers, “all the congregation” complained against Moses and Aaron, claiming that they “had killed the people of the Lord” (16:41)! Had the people forgotten the way that Korah and his companions had died? Although Moses had specified the “sign” that would demonstrate the Lord’s will, clearly the Lord was responsible for their deaths. They were punished for rejecting the authority of the Lord as manifested through Moses and Aaron. On the very next day, the people once again challenged Moses and Aaron!

The Lord’s response to the people’s complaint was to send plague into the congregation. Once again, Moses and Aaron saved the people. By Moses’ instruction, Aaron took his censer with incense and put himself between the living and the dead among the people, thus stopping the plague (16:46-48). Almost fifteen thousand people died of the plague.

The blindness of Dathan, Abiram and the rest of the congregation is astonishing! In their resentment of Moses and Aaron, they seemed to completely forget what actually had happened. Passion often blinds people to truth.

This story about Korah and his followers provides us with another important lesson regarding respect for the Lord’s authority. When the people challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron, they were essentially challenging the authority of God because Moses and Aaron had been given their leadership positions by God. As Moses said, “By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will” (16:28).

The Lord’s plan for the organization of the local church is to lead the congregation by means of elders. Those who oppose elders in their legitimate role as leaders essentially reject the authority of God because He put them into that role. We need to remember the story of Korah just as the Israelites did when they saw the bronze covering on the altar.