

RED ALERT!

Korach

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DIVREI TORAH

- Korach was upset that Moshe and Aharon had taken the two top positions of leadership for themselves and gave other positions to their closest friends and family. The first question is why did Korach wait until now to stage this rebellion. The Ramban wrote that he chose this time because after the failed spy mission, the entire nation was depressed when they heard Hashem's decree that they were to die in the desert. Moshe's popularity was at a dismal level. Now was the right time to rebel. Maybe he could get considerable national support for his rebellion. Korach was a smart person and quite wealthy, according to the Midrash, but his ambition got the best of him. He was doomed to failure because he failed to absorb that all the Moshe did was fulfill Hashem's word.

- Datan and Aviram were at the forefront of the rebellion. They were thorns in Moshe's side from the initial days when Moshe killed the Egyptian. They were the two Jews who were arguing. They were the ones who purposely left over the Manna for the next day. And they were the leaders of those saying Let us return to Egypt. They claimed that

the Jewish people were leaving a land flowing with milk and honey, Egypt. Nevertheless Moshe approached them to see if he could appease them and convince them to back down. Rashi wrote that Moshe was teaching us to make the extra effort to attempt to make peace, in all controversial matters.

- Where did Korach obtain his wealth? Being a Levi, he was not subjected to the Egyptian slavery and hence was not entitled to looting Egypt nor from the gains from seeing the Egyptians drowning in the Red Sea. Commentators conjecture on this question. Some say he stole from the Levi tribe, but I reject that on the basis of what some sources say that he was a righteous Jew. His wealth had to come from Egypt where his not being a slave gave him the freedom to be involved in business. But his wealth probably contributed to his ambition and desire to elevate himself in positions of influence and authority. The Torah states that the earth swallowed him up along with his possessions because wealth helped to corrupt him. It is interesting that his sons separated themselves from their father and did not join the rebellion and therefore did not die. (Bamidbar 26:11)

- In Pirkei Avot (5:17), our sages said that all disagreements that are for the sake of Heaven are destined to be sustained. If the disagreement is not for the sake of Heaven, they will not be sustained. The example of the former are the disagree-

ments between Hillel and Shammai, because these debates were all for seeking the truth. The disagreements that are not deemed worthy are the debates of Korach and his congregation. Rabbis throughout time (Rav Yonatan Eybeschutz, the Malbim, et al) point out that the Mishna does not say “Korach and Moshe” because there were strong disagreements between Korach and his followers. Each member of the rebellion wanted something else. Some wanted to be Kohanim; some wanted to be Kohen Gadol; others wanted to replace all the Leviyim.

- This was the fourth major issue for Bnei Yisrael. The previous ones, Moshe went to bat for the people. When the people worshiped the Golden Calf, Moshe pleaded with Hashem because the people really wanted a replacement for Moshe who was still atop Mt. Sinai. When the people complained and wanted meat, Moshe prayed to Hashem for them. And then there was the failed spy mission, and Moshe again begged Hashem. But now with Korach’s rebellion, Moshe had enough. He weakened and did not pray for the people. Maybe he now realized the flaws in the people. He did not believe in them any longer. And maybe he now came to realize that the nation was not worthy of any of his pleadings with Hashem. These people were sinners before and now! (RED)

- The localized earthquake that ended Korach’s life was quick and decisive. This

hole in the ground that swallowed Korach was created on the first Friday during the week of Creation. (Sanhedrin 110a). Why didn’t Moshe know about this special act of Creation through his prophetic vision? The Chatam Sofer (Rav Moshe Sofer, 1762-1839, mid-Europe) wrote that Hashem did not allow Moshe to see any of the ten items created at the very end of the week of Creation, since among them was also the burial place of Moshe himself, a place not known to anyone. So since Moshe was denied knowledge of all ten items, he did not know that the earth was going to open up. Hashem used a different method of death for the rebels. Fire and a plague were used to end this rebellion for once and for all.

Questions by RED

From the Text

1. How many people joined Korach in the rebellion? (16:2)
2. How did Hashem stop the rebellion? (16:32)
3. What happened to the 250 followers of Korach? (16:35)
4. After their death, there were still followers of the rebellion, and they died in a plague. How many died? (17:14)
5. Without a portion of land as a heritage, how did the Leviyim support themselves? (18:24)

From Rashi

6. What did Korach really want with this rebellion? (16:1)
7. Why did Moshe fall on his face when he heard Korach's challenge? (16:4)
8. Why did Moshe talk to Korach and to Datan and Aviram to stop the rebellion? (16:12)
9. Why did Hashem use the Ketoret (spice offering) to stop the plague? (17:13)
10. How far can a non-Kohen and non-Levi go inside the Mishkan before he will die? (17:28)

From the Rabbis

11. Initially Ohn ben Pellet was one of the leaders of the rebellion, but then his name disappeared. What happened? (Sanhedrin 109b)
12. Earthquakes are a part of nature. What made this one unique? (Ramban)
13. In front of the Holy Ark was placed a container of Manna and Aharon's staff. Which king hid these two items forever? (Yoma 52b)

From the Midrash

14. What is the punishment for a Kohen who did the job of a Levi?

From the Haftara (Yeshayahu)

15. What war will immediately precede the coming of the Mashiach?

Relationships

- a) Korach - Yitzhar
- b) Korach - Aharon
- c) Korach - Yocheved
- d) Nachshon - Elisheva
- e) Elisheva - Pinchas

ANSWERS

1. 250
2. The earth swallowed up Korach and his family.
3. They were consumed by a divine fire.
4. 14,700.
5. They receive Ma'aser, a tenth of all the produce.
6. Korach wanted to be the prince of the Kehat family (which Moshe had given to a different cousin, Elitzafan ben Uziel.).
7. Moshe felt powerless to ask forgiveness this time for the people.
8. You should make every attempt to end a controversy.
9. The people felt that the Ketoret causes death, as in the case of Nadav and Avihu and Korach's followers. Now they will see that Ketoret does not cause death.
10. He can enter the Courtyard, but not the Mishkan itself.
11. His righteous wife convinced her

husband to back away because he would not gain anything.

12. This earthquake was only for a small number of specific people, all sinners in the rebellion.

13. King Yoshiyahu.

14. Death by Heaven.

15. The war of Gog and Magog.

Relationships:

a) Son & father

b) First cousins

c) Great nephew & great aunt

d) Brother & sister

e) Grandmother & grandson