

# KORACH

38th of the 54 sedras;  
5th of 10 in Bamidbar



Written on 184 lines (rank: 32nd)

13 Parshiyot; 7 open and 6 closed

95 p'sukim - rank: 39th

1409 words - rank: 36th

5325 letters - ranks: 35th

9th in Bamidbar in these 3 categories

Above average in words & letters per pasuk. Korach is a short sedra (in a Book with many long sedras) with fairly long p'sukim (in a Book with lots of short-pasuk sedras)

## MITZVOT

9 mitzvot - 5 positives, 4 prohibitions

Only 17 sedras have more mitzvot; 35 have fewer. Korach just makes it into the top third (tied with Ki Tisa)

## Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P> X:Y (Z)] and [S> X:Y (Z)] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the beginning of the parsha; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Numbers in [square brackets] are the Mitzva-count of Sefer HaChinuch AND Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot. A=ASEI; L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is the perek & pasuk from which the mitzva comes.

## Kohen - First Aliya 13 p'sukim - 16:1-13

[P> 16:1 (19)] "And Korach took..."  
VAYIKACH KORACH -

Commentators suggest different meanings for this phrase:

- Korach took himself away from Moshe and the mainstream population, to challenge Moshe's authority;
- Korach took some of his fellow Leviyim and some Reuvenites with him in his rebellion against Moshe;
- Korach "took with words" (i.e. persuaded) others to join his rebellion;
- Korach "took apart" - split the people between himself and Moshe.

**SDT:** Korach is identified as the son of Yitzhar, grandson of K'hat, great-grand-son of Levi. It is quite unusual to identify biblical personalities that way. Rashi points out that the lineage mentioned in the pasuk stops before reaching Yaakov Avinu who foresaw Korach's wickedness and pleaded with G-d not to be included in the Torah's account of Korach's deeds. On the other hand, it reached back to Levi because Korach's being from Levi was the major factor involved in the whole episode.

Korach, Datan & Aviram and On b. Pelet (who backed out early on) challenge Moshe's authority.

Korach enlists 250 men to publicize his/their "cause".

**Ponder this:** Korach was a first cousin of Moshe and Aharon. He felt slighted by the fact that both top positions - the leadership and Kohen Gadolship - went to two of his uncle Amram's sons (Moshe & Aharon) and the leadership of the K'hat family went to another cousin, the son of Korach's father's youngest brother - Elitzafan b. Uziel. Korach found sympathy for his cause within the neighboring tribe of Reuven because Reuven himself was passed over for the leadership (which went to Yehuda), the birthright (Yosef received the double portion of the firstborn in the form of the tribes of Efrayim and Menashe) and the Kehuna/Leviya went to Levi. This is not to whitewash Korach's actions, but to show some of his motivation.

Moshe proposes a test - both Aharon and Korach's people will offer incense before G-d and G-d will indicate whom He chooses. Moshe tries to talk Korach out of his fight by telling him that being a Levi is special - why show dissatisfaction and ingratitude by seeking more?

Moshe then calls for Datan & Aviram, but they arrogantly refuse Moshe's summons.

**SDT:** Sources tell us that Korach taunted Moshe Rabeinu with two mocking questions - A talit made completely of T'cheilet, does it require Tzitzit (with the T'cheilet thread)? A house filled with Torah scrolls, does it

require a mezuzah? Both questions pointed to the same argument: A Nation of holy people, people who heard G-d's Voice at Sinai, do they require holy leaders? The basis of suggesting the talit question is the juxtaposition of the Korach episode to the portion of Tzitzit at the end of last week's sedra. Kli Yakar suggests that the mezuzah question is alluded to by the description of Datan & Aviram arrogantly standing at the doorway of their tent and mocking G-d's commandments and Moshe's leadership.

The answer, in fact, is that Tzitzit with T'cheilet is required of every four-cornered garment, even one made totally of T'cheilet wool. And a dwelling (and other types of rooms - with halachic exceptions) requires a Mezuzah, regardless of how many Sifrei Torah are in the room.

A homiletical "explanation" of the significance of a Mezuzah on the door-post of a room filled with Sifrei Torah and other holy books, is that the holiness represented by the content of the room (and the Torah study done therein) are, by definition, internal. It remains within the "four walls of the Beit Midrash". The Mezuzah placed on the doorpost represents the spread of the Torah and its holiness to the outside world. This extension of the domain of sanctity to the "outside world" is an important challenge for the Torah community. (heard a long time from R' Asaf Bednarsh - son of a classmate of mine, back in the day - at a mezuzah-affixing)

## Levi - Second Aliya 6 p'sukim - 16:14-19

Datan & Aviram, two people with a long record of evil behavior, compounded their wickedness with the unpardonable affront to the Land of Israel by referring to Egypt as "the land flowing with milk and honey" that Moshe took us out of, to "kill us in the wilderness".

Moshe angrily asks G-d not to accept the incense offerings of Korach's group. Moshe then reiterates the challenge to Korach. Korach gathers the People to witness the "show-down"; the 250 people and Aharon will each have the special vessel onto which they will place a glowing coal, onto which they will put the incense and they will all be standing at the entrance to the Ohel Mo'ed. G-d's 'glory' was revealed to the People.

**SDT:** The Gemara tells us that when Korach challenged Moshe's authority, it was the Sun and the Moon that appeared before G-d and said: If you side with the son of Amram (i.e. Moshe), then we will continue to shine; if not, we stop shining. What is the significance of this statement from the Gemara? One commentator points out that the Sun and the Moon were originally of equal greatness, and the Moon was diminished because "two kings cannot rule with one crown." This was exactly one of the problems with Korach's arguments, so the Sun and

Moon were particularly appropriate participants in this issue. Notice that not only must the Sun acknowledge the situation, but so must the Moon. Korach's downfall was his lack of acceptance of a moon-like role.

• Most Aliya breaks happen at parsha breaks. This is reasonable to expect. When an Aliya break occurs in the middle of a parsha, and more so, in the middle of a small number of p'sukim that are telling us one episode - then we can pause for a moment and try to see if our attention is being called to something specific. The Aliya-break between Kohein and Levi comes right in the middle of the confrontation between Moshe and Datan & Aviram. Rabbi Sholom Gold points out that the break separates a reference to Egypt as a land flowing with milk and honey with a reference to Eretz Yisrael with the same description. These need be separated, just as one would say L'HAVDIL.

Or maybe... When an Aliya break occurs, it gives us - the people who are listening to Torah Reading - pause to reflect on what just "happened". Our attention is drawn to the last pasuk or so, and we can focus on it while the gabbai is calling the next person to the Torah (and blessing the previous Oleh).

Datan and Aviram had just called Egypt a land flowing with milk and honey. They mocked G-d (Who uses that term for Eretz Yisrael), they mocked Moshe, and they mocked Eretz Yisrael. As terrible as

the Meraglim were with their report and conclusions about Eretz Yisrael, at least they acknowledged the beauty and specialness of the Land. They said that the Land was truly flowing with milk and honey. One has time during the Aliya break to be justly enraged by the behavior of Datan and Aviram... and perhaps by those Jews today who unfortunately, echo their sentiments. Sadly, as we still have the Meraglim among us, we've got a D&A or two, as well.

## Shlishi - Third Aliya 24 p'sukim - 16:20-17:8

[S> 16:20 (3)] G-d tells Moshe and Aharon to separate themselves from the rest of the People so that He will destroy them. Moshe - even while being upset in the extreme with the challenge to his own integrity - pleads on behalf of the People before G-d, asking Him not to punish the multitude because of the sins of an individual.

[S> 16:23 (13)] Moshe warns the People to separate themselves (physically and psychologically) from Korach and his followers lest they be included in the punishment to come. Moshe declares that all will know that G-d has sent him to do all that he does. If these wicked people shall die in a way that others have died, then G-d has not sent Moshe. But if G-d will "provide" a new creation and the earth will open its mouth and swallow

Korach and company and all that belongs to them, then all will know that these people have truly rebelled against G-d. As Moshe finished these words, the earth beneath them split, opened and swallowed all with Korach. (Implied from the p'sukim is that the People did not actually die but left this world in this unusual and miraculous manner.) The People shouted in panic when they witnessed what was happening. A Divine fire consumed the 250 people who offered the incense.

[S> 17:1 (5)] G-d tells Moshe to tell Elazar b. Aharon to collect the fire-pans and scatter the burning coals. The copper from the pans was to be used to plate the Mizbei'ach as a reminder that a non-Kohen must not attempt to do any of the kohein's tasks in the Mikdash. In general, the Torah warns us not to be like Korach and his gang, and not to suffer their fate.

[P> 17:6 (3)] The next day, the People, fearing retribution, complained against Moshe for killing (part of) G-d's Nation. G-d's Cloud descended upon the Ohel Mo'ed and Moshe and Aharon went there for instructions.

**SDT:** The earth not only swallowed Korach's gang, but their possessions as well. The message, says IMREI SHEFER, is that one's wealth often causes a person to be arrogant. This, in turn, leads sometimes to challenging authority. People's possessions were not innocent bystanders, so to speak, to Korach's rebellion, they were the instigators.

• Note that in Korach's rebellion we see not only two punishments, but two very different kinds of punishments, which, in turn, reflect the types of sin. Datan and Aviram and their ilk were plunged down into the bowels of the Earth. But the 250 K'toret-offerers were honorable people. They were godly. The Torah testifies to that when we are first introduced to them. They honestly believed that they were making proper offerings to G-d. Otherwise, they would not have risked their lives. They must have been surprised to have failed! Their sin was reaching TOO high towards the Divine. And their punishment was to be struck down by Divine fire.

Here's another thought... Moshe was chosen by G-d to lead the people. True. And he will always be on a higher level than the rest of us. We, not G-d, elevated Moshe even higher. We decided that we did not want to hear the "Voice of G-d" any more and we requested that Moshe tell us what G-d wants of us, and we would comply. Originally, G-d spoke to all of Israel. That was the plan, so to speak. And that put all of Israel on the level of prophecy. With Moshe as the chief prophet. We forfeited our direct communication with G-d, and we made Moshe the ONLY prophet (at the time). The Gemara says that the "deal" that the People made at Sinai concerning not having direct communication from G-d, was an irrevocable, forever deal. Korach wanted otherwise. Perhaps he was no longer confident that Moshe could

actually bring the People into Eretz Yisra'el, after the whole Meraglim fiasco. The merit of this theory is that it balances the motivations of Korach's gang. Datan and Aviram were BAD. The K'toret bringers were not evil people.

## R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 7 p'sukim - 17:9-15

[S> 17:9 (7)] Once again, G-d "suggests" that He destroy the People. This time Moshe does not plead with G-d on their behalf but immediately instructs Aharon to burn incense on coals from the Altar and that he should pass among the People to stop the plague that had already begun. This quick action stopped the plague which had already claimed 14,700 lives, not counting those who perished with Korach.

Sometimes, in times of trouble, Moshe prays to G-d extensively. His prayer after the Sin of the Golden Calf is an example of long prayer. We can say that it was a prayer that lasted 40 days and nights. When Miriam was stricken with Tzora'at, Moshe uttered a short 5-word (11-letter) prayer for her - KEIL NA R'FA NA LAH. And at this point in Korach, Moshe senses that prayer will not work - swift action is called for.

• On another note, let's take a look at the three "big" sins of the Wandering period: Golden Calf, Spies, Korach. Combining different ideas in the commentaries, we can suggest the



following: The Sin of the Golden Calf represents sins against G-d. He can be, and often is, most forgiving for that kind of sin. The sin of the spies was an affront to Eretz Yisrael. This, so to speak, G-d considered a graver sin, and was less forgiving. Korach's rebellion was directed against Moshe. A BEIN ADAM L'CHAVEIRO sin. These are the kinds of sins that G-d is least willing to forgive. Similarly, in comparing the Flood, which came as a result of a breakdown in society, with the Tower of Babel, where people united to rebel against G-d, we see that the punishments were different in severity.

## Chamishi 5th Aliya 9 p'sukim - 17:16-24

[P> 17:16 (9)] G-d tells Moshe to speak to the People and take a staff from each of the tribal leaders, the staff to be inscribed with the leader's (or tribe's - dispute) name. Aharon's name was to be inscribed on the staff of Levi. The staffs were to be placed in the Ohel Mo'ed. The person whom G-d shall choose, his staff shall blossom; this manifestation of G-d's choice shall hopefully put an end to the complaints and confusion of the People. The People did as instructed and the staffs were placed in the "Tent of Testimony" overnight. On the following day, Aharon's staff had blossomed. Moshe showed the staffs to the People and each tribe took its staff back.

Ramban explains that there were 12 rods, including that of Levi, on which Aharon's name was inscribed. This means that one rod was for Yosef, rather than having separate ones for Efrayim and Menashe. Ramban states that this is always the case: there are 12 tribes - sometimes, Levi is not included - then Efrayim and Menashe are separate; sometimes Levi is included and Yosef is a single tribe. Ramban also says that the Torah is stressing that Levi is one unified tribe - not Leviyim and Kohanim separately - with one tribal leader - namely, Aharon.

## Shishi - Sixth Aliya 24 p'sukim - 17:25-18:20

[P> 17:25 (2)] G-d tells Moshe to return Aharon's staff to the Mishkan as a reminder to the People not to rebel or complain. Moshe does as instructed.

[P> 17:27 (2)] The People express their feelings of despondency and fear of Divine punishment for their lapses.

[S> 18:1 (7)] G-d reiterates that the Kohanim and Leviyim hold special positions and have the responsibility to not risk their lives by overstepping their bounds.

Leviyim are required to guard the Mikdash [388, A22 18:4] (Honor guard)

In fact, according to the mishna in Midot, there were 24 guard posts, three of which were manned by kohanim, and

the 21 others, by Leviyim.

Kohanim and Leviyim are forbidden to perform each others sacred tasks [389, L72 18:3]. A non-Kohen/Levi may not work in the Mikdash [390, L74 18:4]. It is forbidden to disregard the obligations of the Beit HaMikdash honor-guard [391, L67 18:5].

[P> 18:8 (13)] The Torah next lists several gifts that are given to the Kohen - the meat of certain korbanot, t'ruma, bikurim, consecrated objects, the firstborn of kosher farm animals and the redemption/exchange for a firstborn donkey. Firstborn humans are to be redeemed for 5 silver shekels [392, A80 18:15].

Firstborn cow/goat/sheep may not be redeemed [393, L108 18:17], but must be given to a kohein who must bring it as a korban within a year (if unfit for the Altar, the b'chor is the possession of the kohen without restrictions). All gifts of the kehuna (24 in number) are for Aharon and his descendants in perpetuity. However, the Kohen does not receive a portion of land in Israel. (This is the basis of the complex intertwined relationship between kohen and non-kohen.)

## Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 12 p'sukim - 18:21-32

[S> 18:21 (4)] The Levi is to receive tithe (a tenth of produce) from all Israelites. (The 10% is to be taken AFTER the T'ruma was taken off for

the Kohen, which is about 2%.) This is his due in exchange for his work in the Mikdash. Leviyim also do not receive land (except for 48 cities around the country); their role is that of spiritual functionaries. They receive Ma'aser in lieu of a portion of land.

The service of the Leviyim in the Mikdash constitutes a positive mitzva [394, A23 18:23]. So too it is a mitzva to give Ma'aser Rishon to a Levi [395, A127 18:24].

[P> 18:25 (8)] In turn, the Levi is commanded to give a tenth of his tenth to a kohen [396, A129 18:26]. This is known as T'rumat Ma'aser or Ma'aser Min HaMa'aser. This mitzva is performed in a technical way nowadays in Eretz Yisrael to permit the balance of the produce to us.

The Korach story is depressing enough, but as a once-upon-a-time, a long time ago, we can keep our distance. Not so the mitzva-content of the sedra. There's no fooling around. We don't do these mitzvot, we die. Keep the mitzvot and we will live. Very strongly put. Learn the Korach lesson; it isn't just a story - it applies to each of us.

## Haftara 24 p'sukim Sh'muel Alef 11:14-12:22

Shmuel HaNavi renews the kingship of Shaul HaMelech, but reminds the people that it is a bad idea to have a human king in the first place. He also recounts some of the backsliding &

punishments of the people from the time of Moshe (this is a major connection to the sedra)... Striking among the common points between sedra and haftara is the invoking of a miracle to "back up" his credentials.

The unexpected violent storm, then, parallels, the flowering stick and/or the Earth swallowing Korach's gang.