

February 9 - Leadership and Rebellion...  
Numbers 16-18

I have three episodes today that need some commentary with very big implications, so buckle your seatbelts! It will be a full 8 minutes!

The rebellion that centered around Korah was a very significant one. It involved 250 leaders in Israel. Korah was the ringleader, and as you read that account you noticed, I know, that God's dealing with them was swift and terrible. Here are the things I want you to notice:

First, the complaint was that Moses and Aaron were somehow violating their rights in exercising godly leadership over them. How often do God's people get themselves into awful plights by listening to Satan's foul lie that somehow their 'rights' have been violated? That was exactly the line he used on Eve in the Garden of Eden. 'Eve,' Satan said, 'don't you realize that God's prohibition against eating the fruit of that tree is only designed to keep you in your place, to keep you from being just like God yourself. Eve - you have a right to that fruit and the knowledge that will come with it.' So Eve ate the fruit.

'Cain,' the voice came again a few years later. 'You have the right to bring any sacrifice you want to worship. It's not fair that God should accept Abel's sacrifice and not yours. Cain, why don't you stand up for your rights and fight this injustice?'

'Korah,' the voice came again, 'Why should you have to always take orders from Moses. You are just as good a man as he is. You're a Levite! People look up to you. Moses and Aaron have got no right to act like the only ones who can talk with God. That's not fair. Korah - do something about it.' And so he did.

The next time you are tempted to be upset because someone that God has put over you - your parents - your boss - your president - your pastor - has violated your 'rights,' stop right there and spend some significant time in the Word and in prayer. The likelihood is strong that Satan is trying to 'put one over on you' and if that is true, you need to be very, very careful before you act - and very certain that the anointing of God is on you. If you are ever in that position, I would suggest you spend some time meditating on the response of David toward King Saul. David will be a positive role model for you when someone who is 'over' you really has violated your rights.

Let me quickly suggest two more things. First, that Moses handled this thing beautifully. He did not defend himself. He "*fell face down*," presumably in prayer. Then Moses left it to the Lord to settle. At some point in time, someone for whom you have been given responsibility before the Lord is going to challenge you - your kids - your students - perhaps a spouse - someone. Get out of the way - don't defend yourself. Let God defend you. He can be so much more persuasive than you!

My last observation flows from the second. If you let Him, God will vindicate His servants and make clear who it is who wears His mantle. The vindication may not be as dramatic or instantaneous as it was in the case of Moses versus Korah, but it will come.

Moving on to chapter 17. The staff of Aaron has had a most illustrious history! It is the same staff that originally belonged to Moses. He had it in his hand on the day he stood before the burning bush. When God asked him what he had in his hand, it was this stick. At God's command he threw it down and it became a snake in his hand. As Moses starts back to Egypt in obedience to God we are told that he took the "staff of God" with him. It was that staff, this time in Aaron's hand, that was thrown down in the court of Pharaoh, and with it he struck the Nile River. Moses held it out over the waters of the Red Sea - with impressive results - and at Rephidim, it was this staff that hit the rock when huge quantities of water poured out. Now here, that same stick of wood is placed before the Lord with Aaron's name written upon it - along with staffs which bear the names of the leaders of each of the other tribes of Israel - and Aaron's staff (we know it was the same stick that was used in all of the other instances because of a verse in Numbers 20 which we will read tomorrow) - Aaron's staff alone blossoms. It sprouts, blossoms and bears fruit overnight, this dead stick of almond wood. And with this miracle, the authority of Aaron as God's chosen High Priest is definitively established, and the grumbling, at least for now, is put to rest.

Is there a lesson here for us? I think so. True leaders among the people of God are not elected from a nominating committee's recommendations. That might be how we certify them as God's leaders among us from time to time, but that is most assuredly not how they come to be leaders. They get to be leaders when God chooses them, prepares them and accredits them in our midst. That is how it happens - Aaron and Moses were not the leaders because they aspired to an office, ran successful campaigns and garnered enough votes to carry the electorate. Much of the time Moses wouldn't have gotten enough votes from the people of Israel to be elected dogcatcher. Moses and Aaron were the leaders because God chose them to lead. It was that simple. There are often people in the church who desperately want to be leaders. (I am convinced that if they really understood all that was involved they would not have such strange ambitions). But wanting to lead, they campaign and cajole and sometimes bully their way into leadership. God never endorses or accredits such 'leaders.' He chooses who will lead and you prove yourself fit to be a leader by being the servant of all. The beginning of chapter 18 makes it abundantly clear (as if Moses and Aaron didn't already understand this) that being a leader brings a great deal of responsibility to rest upon the shoulders of the leader - more responsibility perhaps than some might ever want to bear. He says to Aaron and his sons - 'You, as the priests, are going to bear responsibility for the sanctuary and priesthood, and if there is iniquity, you are going to be the lightning rods for the nation - you are accountable.'

Now there is one more subject that is crying out for our attention this morning. It is the concept of 'tithing.' The idea of 'tithing' is not a new one. In fact, it did not even

originate with the establishment of the Levitical system - though quite clearly one of the major purposes of the tithing system in ancient Israel was to provide materially for the large group of people who were set apart for the work of the Lord in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. The idea of tithing goes back much farther than that, all the way back to Abram, who gave tithes to Melchizedek after he had rescued Lot from the raiding party of the four kings in Genesis 14.

The basic idea behind tithing is quite clearly seen in chapter 18. It is simply this: The first and the best part of everything you have - everything God gives you - belongs to Him and is to be given back to Him. The percentage that Israel was to use as a guide was one-tenth. That was God's portion.

Despite several New Testament references to giving, a lot of people have basically ignored the concept of tithing because it is not explicitly mentioned in the NT. Each week they go to church and when the offering plate is passed, they put in a dollar or two or if they're feeling particularly generous, maybe even five or ten! And in that action of giving just a token amount they are saying quite clearly, 'God, my commitment to you isn't very serious. You can have the leftovers of my life - the first and best part is mine. If, when I have cared for all the other things I need and want, there is anything left, perhaps I'll give a bit of it to you.'

I want to challenge you to do just that. If the spiritual discipline of tithing is not something that you are already practicing, I want you to prayerfully consider the 'experiment in obedience' - the one that the Book of Malachi suggests. Take God at His word and put Him to the test. Now this isn't a get rich quick scheme - no one is promising you that - but it is a matter of obedience, and I believe that if we begin to obey the Word of God in this matter - if we start bringing the tithes into the storehouse - the local church - that God will begin to bless us in ways that heretofore you have not known.