

Bi121 Old Testament

Lesson Bi121-28 Korah's Rebellion (Num 16-17)

Is there a way to know for sure that God has called anyone or set them apart for ministry? Usually people feel they are not worthy to be used by God, but sometimes a person's pride and ambition does get in the way. As this story illustrates, it is best to let God prove that He has called someone by working through them. Only He can change people and their attitudes. Only God can confirm the ministry He has given.

As Israel went back into the wilderness, a group of men became proud and insulting and rose up against Moses and Aaron. The leader was Korah, from the tribe of Levi. With him was a group of 250 well-known leaders and they complained boldly to Moses: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"

Moses fell facedown and said to Korah, "In the morning the Lord will show who belongs to him and who is holy. You Levites have gone too far! Isn't it enough for you that God has separated you from the rest of the Israelites to do the work at the Lord's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? Now you are trying to get the priesthood as well. It is against the Lord that you and your followers have banded together. Tomorrow all of us will stand before the Lord holding censers, bronze containers, filled with fire and incense. The Lord will choose who he wants to lead the people."

Then Moses summoned two of the organizers, Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab. They sent word saying, "We will not come! Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? Moreover, you have not brought us into the Promised Land. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!" In their twisted thinking they had come to consider the bondage of Egypt as a place of milk and honey, rather than Canaan being the land of milk and honey.

This made Moses angry. He pleaded his innocence to the Lord, "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them."

The next day, Moses, Aaron, and all 250 men stood at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting with their censers filled with fire and incense. The glory of the Lord appeared to the entire assembly, and God said to Moses and Aaron, "Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once." But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and begged, "Oh, God, will you be angry with everyone for what one man has done?"

God said, "Tell the people to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins." So everyone moved back. The leaders of the rebellion had come out and stood next to the door of their tents, along with their wives and children.

Moses spoke to the congregation. “This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that is was not my idea: If these men grow old and die a natural death, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated Yahweh with contempt.”

As soon as he finished speaking, the ground under them split apart, the earth opened its mouth and those leaders with their families and possessions fell into the earth. Then the ground closed up around them swallowing every one of them. People screamed and ran thinking they might be swallowed as well. Then fire came from God and consumed the 250 men who had offered the incense. These men who dared to offer fire and incense to the Lord were themselves put to death by fire from God.

The Lord said to Moses, “Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest to take the censors from among the men’s ashes, and scatter the coals, for the censors are holy—the censors of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives. Hammer them into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the Lord and they are holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites that only the descendants of Aaron should burn incense before the Lord.”

Even with all of this, the people were still grumbling against Moses and Aaron the next day saying, “You killed the Lord’s people.”

But as the assembly gathered in opposition and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared and told Moses, “Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.”

Moses and Aaron bowed to the ground and Moses said to Aaron, “Quick, take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for their sins. Wrath has come out from the Lord, and He is striking them with a plague.” Aaron did as Moses had said and ran into the midst of the people. The plague had started, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead. The plague stopped, but still 14,700 people died that day in addition to the rebels.

To solve the issue of the priesthood, the Lord said to Moses, “Have the leader of each tribe bring a walking stick—a staff. Write the name of each man on his staff. Put Aaron’s name on the tribe of Levi’s staff. Place them together in the tabernacle in front of the Ark of the Covenant. The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout. I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you!”

Moses followed the Lord’s instructions. The next day, He went in and saw that Aaron’s staff had not only sprouted overnight, it had formed buds, blossomed, and produced almonds! Moses brought out all the staffs. The people saw them and were amazed. Aaron’s staff was put back into the Tabernacle to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. And from that day on, the people did not even want to go near the Tent of Meeting, for fear of dying.

This story is **important** because it illustrates that God must be the one to choose spiritual leaders. Just because a person proclaims themselves to be a leader does not mean God has put His hand on them.

The main **truth** of this story is that there are consequences to rebelling against the leadership God has set in place.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions.

1. What was the complaint of Korah and his followers to Moses?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, "You have taken your authority too far; the Lord is with all of us," you are correct.
2. What was the response of Moses to this challenge?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, "The Lord will choose whom he wants to lead the people," you are correct.
3. What did the Lord do to punish the leaders of this rebellion?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, "the earth opened up, and those leaders and their families fell into the earth," you are correct.
4. How did God affirm again who were to be priests in Israel?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, "God made Aaron's walking stick sprout, form buds, blossom, and produce almonds as a sign to Israel," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened; see the events in your mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and retell it until you feel sure you are repeating the circumstances and actions correctly. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly. Then tell this story to someone who has never heard it. Ask, "What does this passage teach about who really chooses leaders for the church today." Discuss the answers.