

## Rebellion

In chapter 13 we read about how Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses, claiming that they should have a share in leading the people. Here in this chapter comes yet another rebellion against God and His chosen leaders. This time it is spearheaded by one Levite (Korah) and three Reubenites (Dathan, Abiram, and On). The Scripture says these men “became insolent” and rose up against Moses. Along with these four, 250 community leaders in Israel also approached Moses. They insisted that they ought to have a share in the priesthood as well as the sons of Aaron (v10).

### Moses Reacts to the Rebels (16:4-17)

Naturally, a rebellion such as this upset Moses (and God) very much. Moses told the rebels, to return the next day each carrying a censer of fire with incense to the LORD. (Only the priests were allowed to burn incense to the LORD.) The LORD would show everyone whom He had chosen to carry out the duties of the priesthood.

! Korah and His followers claimed the priesthood on the basis of the fact that “the whole community” was holy. How ridiculous! Since they had left Egypt, unbelief among Israel had been getting more and more pronounced.

### The Day Dawns (16:18-35)

The next day, the rebels came as instructed with their incense. God has in mind to destroy them all immediately, but Moses pleads that God would not bring judgment on the entire assembly.

God instructed Moses to separate Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their families from the rest of the assembly. Then Moses told the people that the LORD would make a statement concerning who would be priests in Israel. He proclaimed that if the men would die a natural death, that would be a sign from God that he had *not* spoken with the authority of God. But if they died in some miraculous manner, that would be a sign that God stood by Moses’ words concerning the priesthood of Aaron and his family.

Immediately the earth opened up and swallowed Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their entire households. The sign from God was clear. Then the LORD sent fire and consumed the 250 rebels (non-priests) who were offering incense.

! In what ways do we rebel against the LORD?

## Remembrance (16:36-40)

This insolence and rebellion against God and against His plans was not healthy for the Israelites! Somehow they had to start getting some control of themselves. The LORD instructed Moses to take the censers of the men who had died and hammer them into sheets of metal to overlay the altar.

The bronze overlay was to be a reminder that only descendants of Aaron, true priests, could approach the LORD with incense and fire.

## Another Round of Grumbling (16:41-50)

You would think that by this time the people would be about finished with their foolishness, but it continued. They now dared approach Moses *again* and grumble about the judgment that had been brought on those who took part in the rebellion. “You have killed the LORD’s people!” they said. How foolish they were. The LORD had enough of it. He immediately sent out plague against Israel. Aaron took a censer and went to make atonement for the people. “He stood between the living and the dead and the plague stopped.”—but not before 14,700 died.

! Aaron shows us a classic example of a priest’s *intercession* on behalf of the people—just as Christ would intercede on behalf of the world’s sin.

## NUMBERS 17

### One More Sign From God

The LORD gives one final sign that *Aaron is the priest* and his descendants *alone* constitute the priesthood of Israel. A leader from each tribe brought a staff to Moses. On the staff of Levi, Aaron’s name was written. They were placed in the Tent. The next day, Aaron’s staff had blossomed and produced almonds. The others did nothing.

Aaron’s staff was placed in the ark of the covenant as a sign to the rebellious. God had chosen His priests to come before Him on behalf of the people. The people would have to abide by His decision and stop their constant grumbling.

The people quickly cried, “We are lost, we are all lost!” Again, an exaggeration and an untruth. They were not *all* lost. Rather those who denied God were lost.