

NUMBERS 16:1-35
MEN WHOM GOD KILLED!
REBELLION AGAINST THE LORD

“Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, ‘You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’ When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, and he said to Korah and all his company, ‘In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; put fire in them and put incense on them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!’ And Moses said to Korah, ‘Hear now, you sons of Levi: is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore, it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?’

“And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and they said, ‘We will not come up. Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us? Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up.’ And Moses was very angry and said to the LORD, ‘Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed one of them.’

“And Moses said to Korah, ‘Be present, you and all your company, before the LORD, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow. And let every one of you take his censer and put incense on it, and every one of you bring before the LORD his censer, 250 censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer.’ So, every man took his censer and put fire in them and laid incense on them and stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. Then Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.

“And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ‘Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.’ And they fell on their faces and said, ‘O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?’ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Say to the congregation, Get away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’

“Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, ‘Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their

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sins.’ So, they got away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. And Moses said, ‘Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD.’

“And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So, they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, ‘Lest the earth swallow us up!’ And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.”¹

Rebellion against the LORD God terrifies me! To rebel against God exhibits gross insolence on the part of the rebel. When encountering such insolence, I have no particular fear for myself; I fear for those individuals who presume against God. Among all the sins with which an individual, a society or a congregation may be charged, presumption against God counts as one of the most egregious. Presumption, insolence, despising the Lord, is a shocking sin—flagrant, horrifying in the impact of such arrogance. To be presumptuous is to be insolent; to be insolent is to show despite toward the Living God, to be contemptuous toward the Creator. Insolence is exaltation of the individual against the LORD God. Such brash behaviour invites divine judgement; in fact, insolence dares God to act. Insolence is sure to bring divine retribution.

Insolence grows out of arrogance. Whenever some individual asserts himself or herself, pushing “self” beyond the order God has provided in creation, that person has entered into rebellion against the will of the Master Designer. The individual becomes guilty of asserting self-will above the will of God. God has set the world in place, ordering it upon certain rules which He established for mankind’s good and for His glory. This divinely established order is witnessed throughout creation.

Disorder in society brings consequences far more severe than we could ever imagine. Tragically, contemporary western culture seems intent on challenging this truth. However, there is a high cost associated with promotion of the “self.” God will win in all such unequal contests and the society that displaces the present culture will have righted itself from the present wickedness that is tolerated in western society. Nevertheless, those who are part of the present culture will have paid a horrible price for pushing the boundaries of order in society.

What is true in the physical world holds equally true in the spiritual world. Within the assembly of the Living God is an expectation that God’s will should prevail. Those whom God has appointed are charged to ensure that His will is stated clearly and that His will is implemented. Should a congregation decide to exalt the will of a few over the revealed will of God, be assured that the Living God will correct the situation.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

GOD IS A GOD OF ORDER — Paul teaches, “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:33]. Creation is characterised by order. Where disorder is witnessed, we speak of illness, of some injury that mars what God created or we speak of the entrance of sin. In fact, as we read the opening verses of the Bible, we are informed of God’s creation. Repeatedly, as God progressively brings into existence the components of creation, He testifies to the goodness of His work.

The light He created was good [see GENESIS 1:4]. Separation of the land from the sea were likewise pronounced good [GENESIS 1:10]. Calling forth vegetation on the third day was declared to be good [GENESIS 1:12]. When God spoke into existence the sun and the moon, giving them their movement so that life would be bounded by time, He said this act was good [GENESIS 1:18]. When God brought forth birds and fish, their presence was good [GENESIS 1:21]. On the sixth day, when God created all the creatures to be found on land, it was declared good [GENESIS 1:25]. At last, when the crowning act of Creation was complete—creating a man and a woman, the Lord God surveyed all He had made and declared that “it was very good” [GENESIS 1:31]. Creation was good because of the order imposed by God who called all things into being. Throughout the millennia since creation, mankind has valued order and symmetry. Anything which violates the harmony of creation cannot be said to be “good” because it lacks symmetry and harmony intended by Him who gave creation its being.

Harmony in society is valued by all mankind. Christians are admonished, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” [ROMANS 12:17, 18]. This command mirrors Jesus’ words, when He said, “Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another” [MARK 9:50]. Indeed, we who are twice-born are commanded, “Let us pursue what makes for peace” [ROMANS 14:19a].

Yet, it seems as if society becomes more dysfunctional with each passing day. Order in society has been turned upside down as contemporary culture attempts to remake multiple facets into some sort of brave new world. Boys are feminised in an attempt to make society more woman friendly, and incidentally to make either sex susceptible to being redefined as to what gender they will be. The concept of gender is introduced early in the educational process so that no individual is quite certain what he, she or it is. Marriage is redefined so that the stabilisation afforded by the home is dismantled. Order is transformed into chaos; yet, we are assured this is progress.

Whether speaking of individual humans or choosing animal breeding stock, symmetry is valued as foundational to the concept of beauty. Individuals whom we consider to be beautiful exhibit symmetry. A mirror bisecting the longitudinal axis would reveal identity on either side of the mirror. We speak of the symmetrical individual as exhibiting complementary, and that is the individual considered to be beautiful, pleasing to the eye.

In the realm of animal husbandry, symmetry is essential for choosing what is beautiful or pleasing to the eye. Anyone doubting this would need to explain why judges of animals are taught to look for symmetry as they compare animals. Also, anyone doubting that symmetry is essential can explain why there exists such spoof competitions as “The Ugly Dog” contests.

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Throughout nature, and especially in the musical arts, cacophony, discordant notes clashing with other notes, is identified as “noise.” It is only when there is harmony and complementarity of the sounds that we speak of beauty in song or in speech. Similarly, though we imagine we enjoy modern art, our eye is drawn naturally to order.

Because this is true, we would anticipate that God values harmony in the spiritual realm as well. Of course, this is true. In the church, urging the saints to strive for unity is a recurring theme. Think of a few of Paul’s statements urging harmony within the congregation of the faithful. “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight” [**ROMANS 12:16**].

In that same letter, the Apostle pleaded with readers to seek harmony in all things. “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.’ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” [**ROMANS 15:1-7**].

Another passage urging harmony on the faithful is **COLOSSIANS 3:12-17**. “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Consider one other plea as the Apostle Paul gives a statement of God’s purpose. “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” [**EPHESIANS 4:1-6**].

The Apostle continues this theme by noting, “He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [**EPHESIANS 4:11-16**].

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Paul is not the only writer pleading for unity and harmony as a reflection of our status in Christ. Peter has written, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” [1 PETER 3:8, 9].

Where the love of God does not control, there is confusion, chaos, disorder. Paul wrote of his fear of what he would find when he went to Corinth because the saints had forgotten who they were in Christ. He spoke of this fear when he wrote, “I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:20].

Contrasting heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom, James cautioned, “If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” [JAMES 3:14-17].

PREPARING FOR REBELLION — “Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron...”

It is a given that rebellion will occur. Every realm of our existence is contaminated with the virus of rebellion. In fact, rebellion was the essence of the sin of our first parents. Adam and Eve rebelled against God’s specific command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [see GENESIS 2:16, 17].

Spurgeon was correct in noting that the story of life is defined by ruin, redemption and regeneration. The creation was ruined by the fall of our first parents. This knowledge is evident from the Apostle’s words which are recorded in ROMANS 8:18-22. “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

To verify that creation is groaning, one need but watch the weather channel! Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, hail storms, floods all alike speak of nature’s groanings. We even hear people talk of the “good old days” when the weather was perfect! Except records of perfection in that realm seldom match our memories.

The violent transitions of societies, the constant cultural conflicts as one generation supersedes the preceding, in the process jettisoning every vestige of the past in order to be replaced by... what? It is uncertain what will replace the old social norms; but we are assured that the new will be better... until we discover that it isn’t. No doubt this accounts for the nostalgia witnessed in music, in art, in fashion, in almost every facet of life. People long for the stability of the past because stability spoke of order in society.

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In the spiritual realm, rebellion is an ongoing characteristic; primarily, this is the result of sin left unjudged. There are no seminary courses on confronting sinful behaviour. Young preachers are left to their own devices in determining how to keep the old ship of Zion on course. Consequently, we learn through our failure more often than not. Fortunately, we do have the Word of God and the wisdom of older pastors. Paul would advise Titus when confronting rebellion, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” [TITUS 3:10, 11].

Timothy had witnessed Paul’s instruction to the Church of God in Corinth when a rebellion against order manifested itself. “Though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” [1 CORINTHIANS 5:3-5].

The Apostle also provided Timothy with an example of how to handle rebellion. “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” [1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20].

It seems an inevitable part of our fallen condition that we are disposed to seek change of existing structures. Paul would warn Titus, and consequently every preacher since that time, “There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach” [TITUS 1:10, 11].

Unfortunately, our fallen nature disposes us to seek transformation within the congregation through deceitful means. Preachers and deacons will shy away from instructing how to accomplish transformation, opting to surprise others with the change after it is effected. Manipulators within the assembly seek to implement change through devious means so that they cannot be held responsible if something goes wrong. (However, they are quite prepared to take credit if matters work out in a positive fashion.) Seldom is there absolute agreement within a congregation on how best to fulfil a mission; there will inevitably be a variety of views on implementation. Within the assembly, we are generally agreed on doctrine, but we are prepared to argue on how best to implement said doctrine. The point is, change is inevitable, but those wishing to create the change are too often prepared to employ rebellious means to achieve their goals.

In the text, we are introduced to a group of rebels who sought to displace the leaders of the assembly. Of course, the rebels would never think of going to God who appointed Moses and Aaron to leadership; they decided to take matters into their own hands. In this, this was not unlike most contemporary rebellions that take place within the assemblies of our Lord. In the case before us today, the rebels were led by a gang of four—a Levite named Korah, two brothers, Dathan and Abiram and a man named On, of whom we hear no more. They gathered a coterie of two hundred fifty men, inciting rebellion through gossip. In multiplied tents for weeks on end family dinners included “roast preacher.” At last, the rebels had sufficient courage to openly attack.

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The rebels charged that *Moses and Aaron had exceeded their authority*: “You have gone too far” [NUMBERS 16:3]! They were charging Moses and Aaron with presumption against the LORD. What is tragic with this charge is that they were blind to their own presumption. What made them think they knew the will of God better than did Moses and Aaron? Thus, Moses would throw back into their faces the very charge they had brought against him: “You have gone too far you sons of Levi” [NUMBERS 16:7]!

As you might expect, the rebels *crafted their rebellion in high-minded ideals*! “All in the community are holy, every one of them and the LORD is among them” [NUMBERS 16:3]. Rebels are incapable of admitting ulterior motives; they are always pure as the driven slush. These rebels were arguing that they were as good as Moses or Aaron. However, that was never an issue. What was an issue was determining order in the assembly! Whom had God appointed to lead?

Let me pause to warn against such rebellious people by pointing to the words of the Wise Man.

“A hateful person disguises himself with his speech
and harbors deceit within.
When he speaks graciously, don’t believe him,
for there are seven detestable things in his heart.
Though his hatred is concealed by deception,
his evil will be revealed in the assembly.”

[PROVERBS 26:24-26 CHRISTIAN STANDARD VERSION]

David warns of such people:

“There is nothing reliable in what they say;
Their inward part is destruction itself.”

[PSALM 5:9a]

The rebels also *accused Moses and Aaron of impure motives*. “Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD” [NUMBERS 16:3]? Moses didn’t appoint himself to lead Israel! God had appointed him. Moses didn’t choose Aaron to be high priest! God had chosen Aaron. The rebels were the ones with impure motives!

CONFRONTING REBELLION — “When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, and he said to Korah and all his company, ‘In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; put fire in them and put incense on them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!’ And Moses said to Korah, ‘Hear now, you sons of Levi: is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore, it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?’”

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Among God's churches, we are certain that the Lord will sort out rebels in His time. However, until God re-establishes order, it falls to those who lead to face the rebels, acting with dispatch and with integrity for the benefit of the congregation and for the glory of God. Moses provides a model for how a leader should respond to rebellion. What is taught for the benefit of the churches could apply equally in society as a whole, though it is doubtful that contemporary western culture will step back from the precipice where it seems poised before they hear the daunting words, "Prepare to meet your God!"

Moses cast himself on the LORD. "When Moses heard [the rebellious assertion], he fell on his face" [NUMBERS 16:4]. Moses was completely dependent on the Living God. Perhaps it would have been nice had Moses known of the rebellion before this stage; however, he was not aware of what was brewing. Now, however, he recognised that the rebellion was beyond his control. What he would not do was retreat in terror. Neither would he seek some compromise with the rebels. By his act of falling face down before all, Moses was confessing his helpless situation.

There exists a perception that we need to understand why people rebel. Let me speak clearly to say that it is unimportant why people rebel. That people rebel is all a leader needs to know. For the sake of the assembly and for the cause of Christ, the leader must recognise rebellion and accept that it has happened. Moreover, the leader must not concern himself with what will happen. If God is in control of the congregation, and He is, He will determine what will come of the rebels and what will come of the leadership.

Again, ***Moses committed the situation to the LORD.*** Moses commanded Korah and those who stood with him, "In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; put fire in them and put incense on them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one" [NUMBERS 16:5-7]. Moses was confident that the LORD would judge, not Moses. If God approved of Korah and the rebels who allied themselves with him, well and good. If, however, the Living God should uphold Moses, then all would recognise God's will.

Moses durst not attempt to defend himself, advocate his integrity or argue his case. Either his life gave evidence of the reality of all that God had done through him, or he would be exposed as a fraud. With the Psalmist, Moses could affirm

"I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, 'You are my God.'
My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my
persecutors!"

[PSALM 31:14, 15]

Finally, having cast himself on the LORD God and having committed the situation to the LORD, ***Moses challenged the rebels.*** "You have gone too far you sons of Levi" [NUMBERS 16:7]. The rebels needed to remember who they were. Moses was claiming a kinship with them—Korah was a cousin to Moses! But more importantly than mere physical relationship, Moses was reminding them of their spiritual kinship. Korah was one appointed by God to serve Him through the Tabernacle. God had called Korah and appointed him; and now Korah was in rebellion against the divine will.

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Moses challenged Korah to think how he was jettisoning his own spiritual life. “Is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore, it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together” [NUMBERS 16:9-11a].

Korah was a Levite, but in rebelling he was presuming against the LORD—he was attempting to usurp the priesthood. Moses openly exposed Korah when he said, “And would you seek the priesthood also?” God appoints to holy service, not man. One of the serious charges against the modern evangelical congregation is the idea that churches hire the pastor—they do not! Not if they are operating as God intends they should operate. We do not have bishops or princes of the church to appoint pastors. We look to God. And yet, how often have pulpit committees or some congregational cabal implied or even said, “We hired you; we can fire you!” Either God distributes gifts according to His will, or man controls the congregation.

In rebelling, Korah and the cabal that united behind him were rejecting God’s will! Think of the horror of that charge. Moses asked Korah and the rebels following him, “What is Aaron that you grumble against him?” In attacking Aaron, Korah was actually attacking God! This is the true danger inherent in rebellion.

Rebellion against the created order is rebellion against God. This is evident when Paul writes, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools” [ROMANS 1:18-22].

Nowhere is rebellion against the created order more abhorrent than when it is discovered within the congregation of the faithful. To assert oneself, to manipulate God’s heritage, to elect those who will lead rather than seeking God’s appointment through waiting before Him in prayer, is the epitome of rebellion. Seeking God’s will to know who should guide the assembly is the biblical standard for God’s leaders.

JUDGING REBELLION — “Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, ‘Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins.’ So, they got away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. And Moses said, ‘Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD.’

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“And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So, they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, ‘Lest the earth swallow us up!’ And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men offering the incense” [NUMBERS 16:25-35].

Moses called Dathan and Abiram, but they refused to respond to him. The rebels were entrenched in their rebellion. They could have repented and sought God’s forgiveness. However, they had firmly planted themselves in opposition to the leaders whom God had appointed. Therefore, they were in rebellion against the LORD God Himself. The remainder of the rebels charged Moses with outrageous malfeasance—he had deceived them when he led them out of Egypt, Moses wanted them to die in the desert and if he could, he would even gouge out their eyes [see NUMBERS 16:12-14].

The answer was simple enough—let the rebels and the leaders appear before the LORD. Let God show whom He chose. It was as though the rebels were being called before the Judgement Seat of Christ before that Judgement was called. Moses and Aaron had given an ongoing accounting of their service before the LORD; their service was an open book. Moses could aver, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed one of them” [NUMBERS 16:15].

Though matters were moving to a conclusion, Korah’s rebellion was growing. “So, every man took his censer and put fire in them and laid incense on them and stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. Then Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation” [NUMBERS 16:18, 19]. More than just those first allied with Korah came to the Tent of Meeting. God was prepared to dispense with the entire congregation; but Moses and Aaron, being God’s leaders, pleaded for the people. “O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation” [NUMBERS 16:22]?

At God’s prompting, Moses warned the congregation to move away from the rebels. He warned that God was about to judge them because they had despised the LORD. Of course, God did judge the rebels. NUMBERS 16:31-35 tells the awful story. “As soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So, they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, ‘Lest the earth swallow us up!’ And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.”

Know that God does judge rebellion. He judges and He will judge rebellion among His people. He is gracious, calling the rebel to cease fighting against Him. Nevertheless, if the rebel persists in rebellion, God will judge. The congregation that walks in rebellion will be judged, finally passing out of existence if it refuses God’s gracious offer of peace. The culture that persists in rebellion will be judged, passing into the dustbin of history. The nation that plunges headlong into rebellion must face judgement. I fear for Canada whenever I read the words of the Psalmist, warning,

NUMBERS 16:1-35
MEN WHOM GOD KILLED! REBELLION AGAINST THE LORD!

“The wicked are turned back and sent to Sheol;
this is the destiny of all the nations that ignore God.”

[PSALM 9:17 NET BIBLE]

We are assured from Scripture that all Christians must appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ. The Apostle has written, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:10]. Yet, the text cautions that there is a present judging of rebellion; that causes me to tremble for the rebel heart.

I know that God shall judge the wicked. How dreadful are the words John writes! “I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” [REVELATION 20:11-15].

And yet, God does judge nations and cultures in this life. Ask the Canaanites. Ask Babylon. Ask Moab. These ancient nations were exalted, only to fall when judged. No empire has survived once moral decay became widespread in that society. The same holds true for the western empires of this day. I tremble when I consider that God is righteous and that He created all things to reflect His nature. We must never forget that “God is not characterized by disorder but by peace” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:33 NET BIBLE].

We need a new birth, a fresh start; and a new birth is precisely what we are offered in Christ Jesus. This is the offer God gives to all who will accept it. The Apostle Paul pleads with all who will receive the offer in 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-6:2, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says,

‘In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’

“Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

This is our plea to all who hear the message this day. Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your house. Amen, and amen.