

Jews behaving badly. Why was the Korach rebellion so popular?

Adam Berlin – December 2025, Limmud

The story of the Korach rebellion

Source 1 – Bemidbar Chapter 16/17

Section A: The Complaint (Bemidbar, Chapter 16 verses 1-5)

וַיִּקְרָח כֹּרַח בֶּן־יִזְחָר בֶּן־קֹהָת בֶּן־לֵוִי וְדָתָן וְאֲבִירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וְאֹזֶן בֶּן־פִּלֵּת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן:

Now Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, betook himself, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—descendants of Reuben —

וַיִּקְמֹדוּ לַפָּנִי מֹשֶׁה וְאַנְשֵׁים מִבְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמֵשִׁים וּמְאֹתָיִם גִּישׁוּעֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד אַנְשֵׁי־שָׁם:

to rise up against Moses, together with two hundred and fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute.

וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב־לַכֶּם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם יְהוָה וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל־קְהַל יְהוָה:

They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and יהוה is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above יהוה’s congregation?”

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה נִפְלַע עַל־פָּנָיו:

When Moses heard this, he fell on his face.

Section B: The Fire-pan Ceremony (Bamidbar, Chapter 16 verses 6-20)

וַיִּדְבֹר אֶל־קֹרַח וְאֶל־כָּל־עֲדָתוֹ לֵאמֹר בֹּקֶר וַיָּלַע יְהוָה אֶת־אֲשֵׁר־לְוֹ וְאֶת־הַקְּדוֹשִׁים וְהַקְּרִיב אֵלָיו וְאֶת אֲשֵׁר יִבְחַר־בּוֹ יִקְרִיב אֵלָיו:

Then he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Come morning, יהוה will make known who is [God’s] and who is holy by granting direct access; the one whom [God] has chosen will be granted access.

זֹאת עֲשׂוּ קַחוּ־לָכֶם מִחֹתֹת קֹרַח וְכָל־עֲדָתוֹ:

Do this: You, Korah and all your band, take fire pans,

וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ וְשִׂימוּ עֲלֵיהֶן וּקְטַרְתֶּם לַפָּנִי יְהוָה מִחֹר וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה הוּא הַקְּדוֹשׁ רַב־לַכֶּם בְּנֵי לֵוִי:

and tomorrow put fire in them and lay incense on them before יהוה. Then the candidate whom יהוה chooses, he shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!”

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־קֹרַח שְׁמַעוּ־נָא בְנֵי לֵוִי:

Moses said further to Korah, “Hear me, sons of Levi.

הַמַּעֲט מִכֶּם כִּי־הִבְדִּיל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתְכֶם מֵעַדְתּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַקְרִיב אֶתְכֶם אֵלָיו לַעֲבֹד אֶת־עַבְדוֹת מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְשָׂרְתָם:

Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the community of Israel and given you direct access, to perform the duties of יהוה's Tabernacle and to minister to the community and serve them?

וַיִּקְרַב אֶתְּךָ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיוּ בְנֵי־לֵוִי אִתְּךָ וּבִקְשׁוּתָם גַּם־כִּהְנִיָּה:

Now that [God] has advanced you and all your fellow Levites with you, do you seek the priesthood too?

לָכֵן אִתְּךָ וְכָל־עַדְתְּךָ הַנֹּעְדִים עַל־יְהוָה וְאֶהְרֹן מִה־הוּא כִּי (תלונו) [תלינו] עליו:

Truly, it is against יהוה that you and all your company have banded together. For who is Aaron that you should rail against him?"

וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לִקְרֹא לְדָתָן וְלֵאבִירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נֵעֲלֶה:

Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come!"

הַמַּעֲט כִּי הֵעֲלִיתָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ לְהַמִּיתָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי־תִשְׁתַּחֲרַר עָלֵינוּ גַּם־הַשְׂחָרָר:

Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us?

אִם לֹא אֶל־אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ הִבִּיאָתָנוּ וְתָתֵנוּ לָנוּ נַחֲלַת שָׂדֵה וְכַרְם הַעֵינִי הַאֲנָשִׁים הַהֵם תִּנְקַר לֹא נֵעֲלֶה:

Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out the eyes of those involved? We will not come!"

וַיַּחֲסַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה אֶל־תָּפֹן אֶל־מִנְחַתָּם לֹא חָמָזוּר אֶחָד מֵהֶם נִשְׂאָתִי וְלֹא הִרְעִיתִי אֶת־אֶחָד מֵהֶם:

Moses was much aggrieved and he said to יהוה, "Pay no regard to their oblation. I have not taken the ass of any one of them, nor have I wronged any one of them."

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־קֹרַח אִתְּךָ וְכָל־עַדְתְּךָ הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אִתְּךָ וְאֶהְרֹן מִחָר:

And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company appear before יהוה, you and they and Aaron.

וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִחֻתָּתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֵם עָלֵיהֶם קִטְרֹת וְהַקְרִבְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אִישׁ מִחֻתָּתוֹ חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֵתִים מִחֻתָּת וְאִתְּךָ וְאֶהְרֹן אִישׁ מִחֻתָּתוֹ:

Each of you take your fire pan and lay incense on it, and each of you bring that fire pan before יהוה, two hundred and fifty fire pans; you and Aaron also [bring] your fire pans."

וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִחֻתָּתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֵם עָלֵיהֶם אֵשׁ וַיַּעֲמֵמוּ עָלֵיהֶם קִטְרֹת וַיַּעֲמֵמוּ אֶתְּךָ וְאֶהְרֹן:

They each took their fire pan, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and took a place at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as did Moses and Aaron.

Section C: The wrath of G-d (Bemidbar Chapter 16, Verses 21-30)

וַיִּקְהַל עֲלֵיהֶם קִרְחַת אֶת-כָּל-הָעֵדָה אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד-יְהוָה אֶל-כָּל-הָעֵדָה: {ס}

Korah gathered the whole community against them at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Then the Presence of יהוה appeared to the whole community,

וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאַל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר:

and יהוה spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

הִבָּדְלוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאַכְלָה אֹתָם כְּרִגְעָה:

“Stand back from this community that I may annihilate them in an instant!”

וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם וַיִּנְאֲמְרוּ אֶל אֱלֹהֵי הַרוּחַת לְכֹל-בָּשָׂר הַאִישׁ אֶחָד יַחֲטֵא וְעַל כָּל-הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָף: {ס}

But they fell on their faces and said, “O God, Source of the breath of all flesh! When one member sins, will You be wrathful with the whole community?”

וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

יהוה spoke to Moses, saying,

דַּבֵּר אֶל-הָעֵדָה לֵאמֹר הֶעֱלוּ מִסְכֵּיב לְמִשְׁכַּן-קִרְחַת דָּתָן וְאַבִּירָם:

“Speak to the community and say: Withdraw from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.”

וַיָּקָם מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-דָּתָן וְאַבִּירָם וַיִּלְכוּ אַחֲרָיו זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, the elders of Israel following him.

וַיִּדְבֹר אֶל-הָעֵדָה לֵאמֹר סוּרוּ נָא מֵעַל אֲהֲלֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים הַרְשָׁעִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאַל-תִּגְעוּ בְּכָל-אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם פֶּן-תִּסְפוּ בְּכָל-חַטָּאתָם:

He addressed the community, saying, “Move away from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing that belongs to them, lest you be wiped out for all their sins.”

וַיַּעֲלוּ מֵעַל מִשְׁכַּן-קִרְחַת דָּתָן וְאַבִּירָם מִסְכֵּיב וַדָּתָן וְאַבִּירָם יָצְאוּ נֹצְבִים גַּתַח אֲהֲלֵיהֶם וּבְנֵיהֶם וְטַפָּם:

So they withdrew from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Now Dathan and Abiram had come out and they stood at the entrance of their tents, with their wives, their adult children, and their little ones.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּזֹאת תִּדְעוּן כִּי-יְהוָה שְׁלַחְנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל-הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי-לֹא מִלְּבָבִי:

And Moses said, “By this you shall know that it was יהוה who sent me to do all these things; that they are not of my own devising:

אִם-כְּמוֹת כָּל-הָאָדָם יִמְתּוּן אֵלֶּה וּפְקֻדַת כָּל-הָאָדָם יִפְקֹד עֲלֵיהֶם לֹא יְהוָה שְׁלַחְנִי:

if these people’s death is that of all humankind, if their lot is humankind’s common fate, it was not יהוה who sent me.

ואם-בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא יְהוָה וּפְצָתָהּ הָאֲדָמָה אֶת-פִּיהָ וּבִלְעָה אֹתָם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ חַיִּים שְׂאֵלָה וַיִּדְעֻתְּם כִּי גָאֲצוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת-יְהוָה:

But if יהוה brings about something unheard-of, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, you shall know that those involved have spurned יהוה.”

וַיְהִי כְכַלְתּוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וּתְבַקַּע הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תַּחְתֵּיהֶם:

Scarcely had he finished speaking all these words when the ground under them burst asunder,

וּתִפְתַּח הָאֲרֶץ אֶת-פִּיהָ וּתְבַלְעֵה אֹתָם וְאֶת-בְּתֵיהֶם וְאֶת כָּל-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקְרָח וְאֶת כָּל-הַרְכוּשׁ:

and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all Korah's people and all their possessions.

וַיִּרְדּוּ הֵם וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם חַיִּים שְׂאֵלָה וּתְבַקַּע עֲלֵיהֶם הָאֲרֶץ וַיִּאֲבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקְּהָל:

They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst of the congregation.

וְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֵיהֶם נָסוּ לִקְלָם כִּי אָמְרוּ פֶן-תִּבְלַעֵנוּ הָאֲרֶץ:

All Israel around them fled at their shrieks, for they said, “The earth might swallow us!”

וְאֵשׁ יִצְאָה מֵאֵת יְהוָה וּתְאָכַל אֶת הַחֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֵתֵי אִישׁ מִקְרִיבֵי הַקְּטֹרֶת: {ס}

And a fire went forth from יהוה and consumed the two hundred and fifty contestants offering the incense.

Section D: The Hammering of the Firepans (Bamidbar, Chapter 17, Verses 1-6)

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

יהוה spoke to Moses, saying:

אָמַר אֶל-אֱלֵעָזָר בֶּן-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וְנָרַם אֶת-הַמִּחְתָּת מִבֵּין הַשְּׂרָפָה וְאֶת-הָאֵשׁ זָרַה-הַלְאָה כִּי קָדְשׁוּ:

Order Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to remove the fire pans—for they have become sacred—from among the charred remains; and scatter the coals abroad.

אֵת מִחְתֹּת הַחֲטָאִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנִפְשָׁתָם וְעָשׂוּ אֹתָם רִקְעֵי כַּחַם צִפּוּי לַמִּזְבֵּחַ כִּי-הִקְרִיבָם לִפְנֵי-יְהוָה וַיִּקְדָּשׁוּ וַיְהִי לְאוֹת לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

[Remove] the fire pans of those who have sinned at the cost of their lives, and let them be made into hammered sheets as plating for the altar—for once they have been used for offering to יהוה, they have become sacred—and let them serve as a warning to the people of Israel.

וַיִּלָּח אֱלֵעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת מִחְתֹּת הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיבוּ הַשְּׂרָפִים וַיִּרְקְעוּם צִפּוּי לַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

Eleazar the priest took the copper fire pans which had been used for offering by those who died in the fire; and they were hammered into plating for the altar,

זָכְרוּן לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִמְעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְרַב אִישׁ זָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזֶּרַע אַהֲרֹן הוּא לְהִקְטִיר קִטְרֹת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה
כְּקֹרַח וְכַעֲדָתוֹ כֹּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: {פ}

as יהוה had ordered him through Moses. It was to be a reminder to the Israelites, so that no outsider—one not of Aaron’s offspring—should presume to offer incense before יהוה and suffer the fate of Korah and his band.

Section E: The rebellion escalates (Bemidbar Chapter 17, Verses 7-16)

וַיִּלְנוּ כָּל־עַדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּחְרַת עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר אַתֶּם הִמַּתְּם אֶת־עַם יְהוָה:

Next day the whole Israelite community railed against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You two have brought death upon יהוה’s people!”

וַיְהִי בַּהֲקָהֶל הָעֵדָה עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיִּפְּנוּ אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַהֲגִה כִּסְּהוּ הָעֵגֹן וַיִּבֶא פְּכוּד יְהוָה:

But as the community gathered against them, Moses and Aaron turned toward the Tent of Meeting; the cloud had covered it and the Presence of יהוה appeared.

וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל־פְּנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: {ס}

When Moses and Aaron reached the Tent of Meeting,

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

יהוה spoke to Moses, saying,

הֲרִמוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאָכַלְתָּ אֹתָם כְּרִגְעַ וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם:

“Remove yourselves from this community, that I may annihilate them in an instant.” They fell on their faces.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח אֶת־הַמִּחְרָת וְתוֹ־עֲלֶיָהּ אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׂים קִטְרֹת וְהוֹלֵךְ מִתְּבֵּה אֶל־הָעֵדָה וְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם
כִּי־יֵצֵא הַקָּצֵף מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה הַתֵּל הַגָּגָף:

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Take the fire pan, and put on it fire from the altar. Add incense and take it quickly to the community and make expiation for them. For wrath has gone forth from יהוה: the plague has begun!”

וַיִּשָּׂח אַהֲרֹן כֹּאֲשֶׁר | דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרָץ אֶל־תּוֹךְ הַקָּהֶל וַהֲגִה הַתֵּל הַגָּגָף בָּעָם וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַקִּטְרֹת וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל־הָעָם:

Aaron took it, as Moses had ordered, and ran to the midst of the congregation, where the plague had begun among the people. He put on the incense and made expiation for the people;

וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין־הַמֵּתִים וּבֵין הַחַיִּים וַתֵּעָצֵר הַמַּגֵּפָה:

he stood between the dead and the living until the plague was checked.

וַיְהִי הַמֵּתִים בַּמַּגֵּפָה אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר אֲלָף וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת מִלִּבְד מֵהַמֵּתִים עַל־דְּבַר־קֹרַח:

Those who died of the plague came to fourteen thousand and seven hundred, aside from those who died on account of Korah.

וַיָּשָׁב אֶהֱרֹן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהַמַּגֵּפָה נֶעְצְרָה: {פ}

Aaron then returned to Moses at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, since the plague was checked.

Section F: The Experiment of the Staff (Bemidbar Verses 17-29)

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

יהוה spoke to Moses, saying:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְקַח מֵאֵת כָּל־נְשִׂיאֵהֶם לְבַיִת אֲבֹתָם שִׁגְיִים עֲשׂוּר מִטּוֹת אִישׁ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ תִּכְתֹּב עַל־מִטָּהוּ:

Speak to the Israelite people and take from them—from the chieftains of their ancestral houses—one staff for each chieftain of an ancestral house: twelve staffs in all. Inscribe each one's name on his staff,

וְאֵת שֵׁם אֶהֱרֹן תִּכְתֹּב עַל־מִטָּה לְגִי בִּי מִטָּה אֶחָד לְרֹאשׁ בַּיִת אֲבוֹתָם:

there being one staff for each head of an ancestral house; also inscribe Aaron's name on the staff of Levi.

וְהִנַּחְתֶּם בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִיעַד לָכֶם שָׁמָּה:

Deposit them in the Tent of Meeting before the Pact, where I meet with you.

וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אֲבַחֲרֶבּוּ מִטָּהוּ יִפְרָח וְהִשְׁכַּחְתִּי מֵעַלֵי אֶת־תְּלִנּוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְלִינִים עֲלַיְכֶם:

The staff of the candidate whom I choose shall sprout, and I will rid Myself of the incessant mutterings of the Israelites against you.

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתְּנוּ אֵלָיו אֶת־נְשִׂאֵיהֶם מִטָּה לְנִשְׂיָא אֶחָד מִטָּה לְנִשְׂיָא אֶחָד לְבַיִת אֲבֹתָם שִׁגְיִים עֲשׂוּר מִטּוֹת וּמִטָּה אֶהֱרֹן בְּתוֹךְ מִטּוֹתָם:

Moses spoke thus to the Israelites. Their chieftains gave him a staff for each chieftain of an ancestral house, twelve staffs in all; among these staffs was that of Aaron.

וַיָּבִיחַ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמִּטָּת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּאֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת:

Moses deposited the staffs before יהוה, in the Tent of the Pact.

וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֹת וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת וְהִנֵּה פָּרַח מִטָּה־אֶהֱרֹן לְבַיִת לְגִי וַיֵּצֵא פְּרַח וַיִּצְיַץ צִיץ וַיִּגְמַל שְׂקָדִים:

The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Pact, and there the staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds.

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּטָּת מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶל־כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּרְאוּ וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִטָּהוּ: {פ}

Moses then brought out all the staffs from before יהוה to all the Israelites; each identified and recovered his staff.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲשִׁיב אֶת־מִטָּה אֶהֱרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת לְמַשְׁמַרְתָּ לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי־מִרְי וְתִכַּל תְּלוּנֹתֶם מֵעַל וְלֹא יָמָתוּ:

יהוה said to Moses, “Put Aaron’s staff back before the Pact, to be kept as a lesson to rebels, so that their mutterings against Me may cease, lest they die.”

וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ כִּן עָשָׂה: {פ}

This Moses did; just as יהוה had commanded him, so he did.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר הֵן גָּנַעְנוּ אֶבְדָּנוּ כָּלֵנוּ אֶבְדָּנוּ:

But the Israelites said to Moses, “Lo, we perish! We are lost, all of us lost!

כָּל הַקָּרֵב אֶל־מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה יָמוּת הָאֵם תָּמְנוּ לְגֹעַ: {ס}

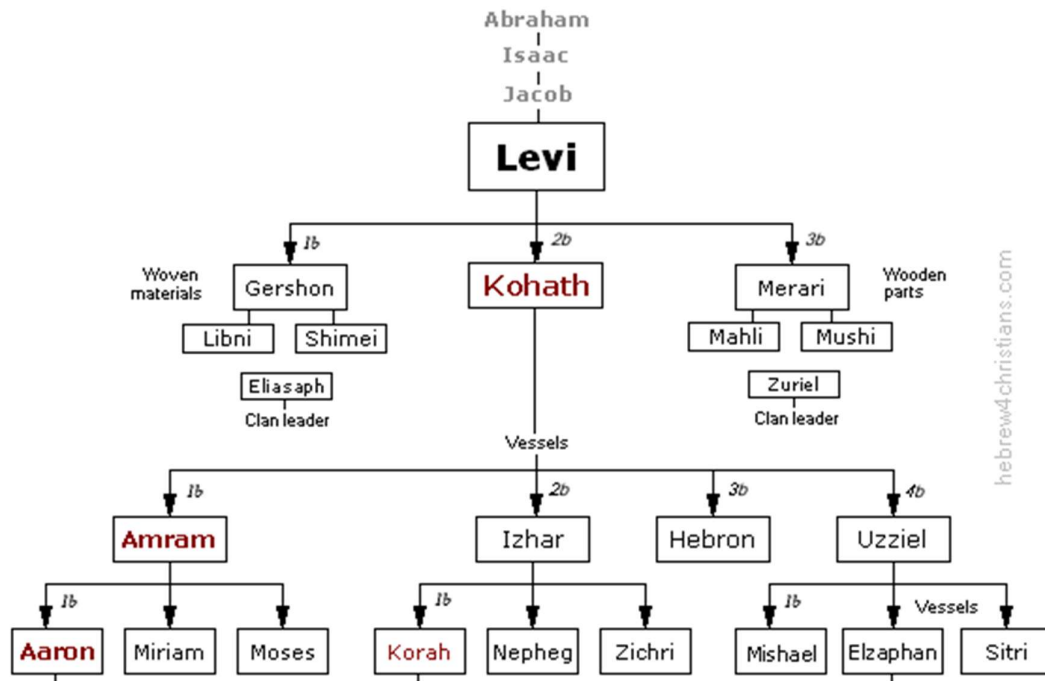
Everyone who so much as ventures near יהוה’s Tabernacle must die. Alas, we are doomed to perish!”

The drivers of Korach’s rebellion

Source 2 - Rashi (Bemidbar, Chapter 16 Verse1)

And what induced Korah to quarrel with Moses? He was envious of the princely dignity held by Elzaphan the son of Uziel whom Moses had appointed prince over the sons of Kohath although this was by the express command of God (Numbers 3:30).

Source 3 – Korach’s family tree



Source 4 - Rashi (Bemidbar, Chapter 17, Verse 8)

But Korah who certainly was a clever (lit., open-eyed) man, what reason had he to commit this folly? His mind’s eye misled him. He saw by prophetic vision a line of great men (more lit., a

great chain) descending from him, amongst them the prophet Samuel who was equal in importance to Moses and Aaron together and he said to himself, “On his account I shall escape the punishment”.

Source 5 – The centrality of the Kohen

- Most of the second half of Shemot deals with the Mishkan and the Priest’s clothing
- Most of Vayikra deals with the sacrifices and the role of the Priest
- Bemidbar remains very Kohen centric
 - Chapter 3 –Pidyan Ha Ben
 - Chapter 4: Subordination to the Cohen
 - Chapter 5: Offerings for the priest (Adulteress, Disputes, Nazarite)
 - Chapter 6: The priestly blessing
 - Chapter 7: No offerings for the Kohathites
 - Chapter 8: Lighting the menorah; Levites require an expiation offering
 - Chapter 10: Trumpets are blown by Aaron’s son
 - Chapter 15: commandment to take first fruits as offering to the priests

Source 6: Midrash Tanchuma, Siman 8

On ben Peleth had his wife save him; for she said to him, ‘What has this dispute to do with you? If Aaron is the high priest, you are a disciple; if Korah is high priest, you are [still] a disciple.’ He said to her, ‘I know that the whole community is holy, since it is written in Numb. 16:3), “for all the congregation are holy.”’ What did she do? She gave him wine to drink, got him drunk, and had him lie down in her bed. Then she sat down at the entrance [of the house] and let down her hair. Everyone who came for her husband On saw her and returned. In the meanwhile they were swallowed up.”

The Korach playbook

Source 7 - Rashi (Bemidbar, Chapter 16 Verse1)

What did he do? He arose and assembled 250 men, fitted to be heads of the Sanhedrin, most of them of the tribe of Reuben who were his neighbours, viz., Elizur the son of Shedeur, (the prince of the tribe of Reuben; cf. Numbers 1:5), and his colleagues, and others of a similar standing... and he attired them in robes of pure purple wool. They then came and stood before Moses and said to him, “Is a garment that is entirely of purple subject to the law of Tzizith or is it exempt”? He replied to them: “It is subject to that law”. Whereupon they began to jeer at him: “Is this possible? A robe of any different coloured material, one thread of purple attached to it exempts it, and this that is entirely of purple should it not exempt itself (i.e. ipso facto be exempt) from the law of “Tzizith”? (Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 2).

Source 8 - Midrash Tehilim 1

He began to speak disparagingly and said to them, "There was once a widow in my neighborhood with two orphaned daughters and she had one field. When she came to plow, Moses said to her (Deuteronomy 22:10), 'You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.' When she came to sow, Moses said to her (Leviticus 19:19), 'Your field shall not be sown with two different kinds of seed.' When she came to reap and make a pile [of sheaves], Moses said to

her (Deuteronomy 24:19), 'You shall leave [some stalks] for the poor and the stranger.' When she came to make a threshing floor, he said to her, 'You shall give tithes [of your crop] and [separate] *terumah*, tithes, first tithe, and second tithe. The righteous woman accepted [the ruling] and complied. What did she do? She sold the field and bought two lambs to clothe herself with their fleece and to enjoy their fruits. When Aaron's firstborn son was born, he came to her and said, 'Give me the firstborns, as the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to me (Deuteronomy 15:19), "Every firstborn that is born in your cattle and your flock, the male [belongs to] Him.'" The righteous woman accepted [the ruling] and complied. When it came time to shear them, he said to her, 'Give me the foreleg, cheeks, and stomach.' She said to him, 'Even though I slaughtered them, I did not escape from your hand. Behold, I am under a ban.' He said to her, 'Give [them to me], as the verse states (Numbers 18:14), "Every ban among the people of Israel shall be yours.'" He took [the portions] and went on his way. She left weeping, as did her two daughters. Such is the way of these [men], who taunt [others] and hang [their claims] on the Holy One

Source 9: Midrash Tanchuma, Korach Siman 3

"Now Korah [...] took." [What] he took [was] his prayer shawl and he went to get counsel from his wife. When the Holy One, blessed be He, said (in Numb. 8:6–7), "Take the Levites from among the Children of Israel and purify them. Now this is what you shall do for them to purify them [...] and have them pass a razor over all of their flesh." [Moses] immediately did so to Korah. [Korah] began to go around all Israel, but they did not recognize him. They said to him, "Who did this to you?" He told them, "Moses. And not only that, but taking me by my hands and by my feet, they waved me and said to me, 'See, you are purified.' Moreover, he brought his brother Aaron, adorned him like a bride, and had him sit in the tent of meeting." The enemies of Moses immediately began to incite Israel against him. So they said, "Moses is king, his brother Aaron is high priest, and his children are deputy high priests! The priest has a priestly offering (*terumah*); the priest has a priestly offering from the tithe; the priest has twenty-four priestly gifts!" Immediately (in Numb. 16:3) "They gathered together against Moses and against Aaron, and they said unto them, 'You have gone too far (*rb*), for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in the midst of them; so why do you elevate yourselves over the community of the Lord?" R. Levi said, "At that very time Korah gathered his company and said to them (i.e., to Moses and Aaron), 'You have increased (rt.: *rbh*) the burden upon us to be more than the slavery of Egypt. We were better off under the Egyptians than under your authority, for in each and every year fifteen thousand and forty-five of us die.'"

Jews Behaving Badly

Source 11: IBN EZRA (BEMIDBAR CHAPTER 16 VERSE1)

NOW KORAH, THE SON OF IZHAR...TOOK. This event occurred in the wilderness of Sinai when the first-born were set aside and the Levites were placed in their stead. Israel thought that our master Moses acted out of his own will in giving his brother an elevated position.

Source 12: Rashi (Chapter 16, Verse 14)

Thou hast not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, and thou hast not given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. — You told us, (Exodus 3:7) “I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt” into a good land: from there (from such a land; cf. v. 13), indeed, you have brought us forth, but you have not brought us instead into a land flowing with milk and honey; on the contrary — you have passed a decree upon us to kill us in the wilderness, for you have said, (Numbers 14:29) “Your carcasses shall fall in this desert.”

Source 13: Table of complaints

No.	Event	Source	Consequence	Place
1	Murmuring about food	Shemot, Ch. 16 V.2	Provision of Mannah and quail	Wilderness of Sin
2	Bitter waters	Shemot, Ch. 17 V.2	Provision of water (followed by attack from Amalek)	Rephidim
3	Golden calf	Shemot, Ch. 32 V. 1ff	3,000 slain by Leviim followed by plague	Sinai
4	Bitter complaining	Bamidbar, Ch. 11, V1	Fire in the outskirts of the camp	Taberah
5	Craving for meat	Bamidbar, Ch. 11	Very severe plague	Kibroth Hatavah
6	Reaction to the spies	Bamidbar, Ch. 14	This generation will not enter the land; 10 spies die in plague	Kadesh, Paran wilderness
7	Korach rebellion	Bamidbar, Ch. 16-17	Plague kills 14,700	[Kadesh, Paran wilderness]
8	Thirst for water	Bamidbar, Ch. 20	Striking of the rock; death of Moses and Aaron	Kadesh, Paran wilderness
9	No food or water	Bamidbar, Ch. 21, V. 5ff	Serpents bite the people. Many people died	Between Mount Hor and Edom
10	Sexual misconduct with Moabites	Bamidbar, Ch. 25, V. 1ff	Plague kills 24,000	Shittim

Source 14: Ramban, Commentary on Bamidbar Chapter 11 Verse 1

As they got further away from Mount Sinai, which was near an inhabitable settlement, and entered *the great and dreadful wilderness* in their first journey, they became upset and said: “What shall we do? How shall we live in this wilderness? What shall we eat and what shall we drink? How shall we endure the trouble and the suffering, and when shall we come out of here?”

Source 15: Rashi (Bemidbar Chapter 17, Verse 28)

יִאמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר הֲנֹ גִנַּעְנוּ אֶבְדָנוּ כָּלֵנוּ אֶבְדָנוּ:

כָּל הַקָּרֵב אֶל־מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה יָמוּת הַעַם תִּמְנֹנוּ לַגִּזְעַ: {ס}

The meaning is: “We cannot be cautious enough in this matter: we are all of us allowed to enter into the court of the appointed tent, but one who betakes himself nearer than his fellow and goes into the appointed tent itself will die!

Source 16: Rashi (Bemidbar Chapter 17, Verse 6)

THIS DO: TAKE YOU CENSERS — What reason had he to speak to them thus? He said to them: according to the custom of the heathens there are numerous forms of divine worship, and consequently numerous priests, for they cannot assemble for worship in one temple; we, however, have One God, one Ark, one Law, one Altar, all constituting one form of worship and therefore we need but one High Priest; — and you, 250 men, all demand the High Priesthood?!