

Life Lesson 35
Korah, Dathan, and Abiram
Text: Numbers 16 -17

Introduction

Do you remember what happened to Miriam when she questioned Moses' leadership? Before the whole congregation she was stricken with leprosy. Do you remember what happened to the people who complained to Moses about the food God provided? God struck them and many died.

You would think the Israelites would have learned from these and the many other examples that God hates murmuring and complaining. He also will defend his servants. It's a fearful thing to speak against one of God's men!

The people were slow learners, though, as we will see in our story today.

The Story

Three of the leaders of the people named Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, rebelled against Moses. They gathered 250 of the most famous and honored men of the Israelites.

"You take too much upon yourself," they told Moses and Aaron. "Every one of us is holy. We're all God's people. Why should you lift yourself up above everyone else?"

As soon as Moses heard their complaint he fell on his knees to pray for them.

"Who are Aaron and I that you should rise against us?," Moses said. "You are really rebelling against God. Bring an offering of incense in your censer. We'll just let God show who He chooses to be His servant."

Moses sent word for Dathan and Abiram to come to the tabernacle.

“We won’t do it,” they replied. “We don’t even want to talk to you. It’s bad enough that you brought us out of Egypt where we had all we needed. Now you won’t lead us into the land you promised. Why should we come and talk to you?”

Moses was really mad at them for that -- and so was God. It wasn’t Moses that brought them out of Egypt, but God. It was their own sin of unbelief that kept them from going into the land God had promised them. They hadn’t learned anything at all from all the troubles God had sent to punish them.

The next morning only Korah and his followers appeared at the tabernacle waiting to see if God would accept their offering. The glory of the Lord appeared to the congregation.

“Get away from the rest of the people,” God told Moses. “I’m going to consume them in a moment.”

Moses and Aaron prayed for the people. “Not all of these people have sinned. Please don’t destroy everybody for the sins of a few.”

“All right,” God replied. “Warn everybody to get away from the tents of Korah and Dathan and Abiram. They are to stay away unless they want to be punished with them.”

Moses warned the people. “I didn’t choose to lead you. God chose me. He sent me to do all these things. Let this be a sign to you. If these three men die an ordinary death, then you will know that God didn’t send me. If they are punished in a new way, if the earth opens up and swallows them alive, you will know that God sent me to be your leader. Then you will know that these men have angered God.”

He had hardly finished speaking these words when the ground began to shake. Right underneath the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the ground opened up. The men and their families and everything they owned were swallowed up by the ground and they perished.

The 250 men who had also rebelled didn't escape either. A fire came down from heaven and burned them up.

I think that was definite proof that Moses was chosen of God to be their leader!

Would you believe it -- the very next day the people began to murmur against Moses and Aaron.

"You have killed all these people of God," they said.

How angry God was then! Those foolish people just would not learn.

Moses again prayed for the people so that not all of them perished in the plague God set to punish them.

The Life Lesson

Those people were so foolish and rebellious. Yet, people still act that way. Sometimes we act that way ourselves. We want to be the leader, the boss. That's what sin is, wanting to be the god, or the boss, of our own lives. That makes us want to be the boss of other people, too.

People want to leave God out of their lives and blame other people for things that happen. Remember Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and remember that it is God who is in control of all things -- so don't complain!

Review Questions

What three men rebelled against Moses?

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

What did they say against Moses?

“He takes too much on himself. We are all as important as he is.”

What happened to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram because of their sin?

The earth opened up and swallowed them alive into hell.

What happened to the 250 people who followed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram?

Fire from heaven burned them up.

Did the people learn to respect Moses after their horrible deaths?

No. They said, “You have killed the people of God.”

What did Moses do when God sent a plague on those foolish people who kept complaining?

He prayed for them.