

MORE FIERY TRIALS

Moses - Part 20

Numbers 16

Intro: The Bible does not give us the complete history of anyone, not even of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the Apostle John's concluding statement in the Gospel he wrote, says this:

25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written (John 21:25).

Even if we add the information given to us in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we still do not have a complete account of the life of our Lord upon earth.

The same is true of Moses. We begin learning about Moses in Exodus 2. Then all through the rest of Exodus, all through Leviticus and Numbers, and on to the end of Deuteronomy, we read about the life of Moses. But even then we do not have a detailed biography, or autobiography, of the life of Moses. But we do have enough that we know that Moses did not have an easy life. He was responsible for some of his problems, but most of them came with the work that the Lord called him to do. And most of these had to do with the people under his leadership. It would appear that many of the Israelites in those days were not people who really knew the Lord. And so it is not surprising that they would cause him trouble. But others, like even Aaron, who did know the Lord, caused him trouble as in the case when the people made and worshiped the golden calf. There must have been other instances in addition to those which Moses recorded in his books where he had trouble with the Israelites, but enough is recorded for us to know that, for Moses, serving the Lord, was not an easy task. It seems that would hardly get through one crisis but what he would find another one waiting for him. It makes reading Exodus through Deuteronomy a little tedious if we allow ourselves to concentrate on the problems that he had with the people of Israel.

But we know that the Lord could have kept him from having any problems, just as the Lord could keep us from having any problems. But we know that the Christian life is not like that. The Lord nowhere in His Word promises that the Christian life will be "trouble free." Instead, he promises that there will be trials, there will be troubles. But, as it was with Moses, so it should be with us. The important thing is what effect

our trials have upon us.

Back in Numbers 12:3 we have a statement regarding Moses which I want to read to you. The translators of the KJV felt that it was made parenthetically and so they set it off with parenthesis marks. And this is what that verse tells us about Moses:

3(Now the man Moses was very meek , above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)

This does not mean that Moses was a pushover. He was actually a very strong leader, and, especially in his later life he never failed to take a stand against anything that was contrary to the will of God. He didn't start out being meek. You will remember that he murdered an Egyptian early in his life, and he did it for a good cause. But he showed then that there was much that he needed to learn about the ways of the Lord.

Moses was not only meek, but the Lord said that he was "very meek," that is, more meek than anyone else. He was humble in his attitude toward himself, and he was humble in his relationship with the Lord. He did not make himself a lord over God's heritage, which Peter mentioned as a qualification for elders in the church, but he devoted his life to serving the Lord and to serving the people of the Lord. He was patient. He was prayerful. When we read how the Lord Jesus described Himself in Matthew 11, 28 through 30, we can say that Moses was like the Lord. What did the Lord say about Himself? Most of you will remember these words when I read them to you. This is what our Lord said:

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

So a meek man according to the Bible, is a godly man, a holy man, a man who loves what God loves and who hates what God hates. But a meek man is gracious and loving, and his first reaction to the sins of others, is grief.

Moses troubles could have made him hard, and difficult to get along with. But under the hand of the Lord his troubles had just the opposite effect. And this is the effect our troubles should have upon us. It looks sometimes like the Lord is trying to destroy our faith, but actually He is seeking to do just the opposite: He is seeking to strengthen our faith, and to make us more like Himself.

So we need to notice this in the added trial, a fiery trial, which Moses faced in Numbers 16.

As you can see, this chapter has 50 verses, and so I am not going to be able to get through these verses in detail this morning. But I want to get the main lesson of the chapter so that we can profit from Moses' experience by seeing how he behaved under trial.

Now let us notice, first of all,

I. THE TRIAL (Num. 16:1-3).

It basically had to do with three men: Korah, who was a Kohathite, of the tribe of Levi. But he was not of the family of Aaron, the priestly division of the tribe of Levi, and that seems to have been his problem. Now Korah had talked about his problem to some of the other men of Israel, and he had found two men of the tribe of Reuben who were sympathetic with him.

You will remember that much later the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth warning them that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." They had a fornicator among them, and they had not taken action against him, and Paul was warning them that one sinner unchecked in a church can soon affect the whole church. And Paul was warning them that they needed to take action against that one sinner.

When I was a child I used to watch my mother bake bread. She would mix flour and water in sufficient quantities to make quite a large amount of dough. Then she would mix into that dough, some yeast. After that she would put the dough in pans, but just enough to fill about half of the pan. Then she would set it aside to let it, as she would say, "rise." I don't know how long she would let the dough in pans set, but I think it was usually overnight. But to my amazement when she was ready to put the dough into the oven, the dough had risen in the pans to where it was just slightly above the sides of the pan. And she explained to me that it was the yeast that made the dough increase. Time has probably erased some of the details of this from my mind, but I always think of my mother baking bread when I read those words of the Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:6, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Leaven was yeast. And Paul was saying that it only takes a little bit of sin to cause big trouble in a church. It can even ruin a church.

Now going back to Numbers 16, Korah was like a little leaven, a little yeast. He had affected two men of the tribe of Reuben with his discontent, and the three of them together had got two hundred and fifty princes of Israel to join with them. These were well-known, influential men who could easily influence others to join in their rebellion. I don't know how long all of this had taken, but I can assure you that it was not very long. Together they brought their charge against Moses and Aaron. And you see it in verse 3. (Read and explain.)

Now in the verses which follow we have:

II. MOSES' RESPONSE TO KORAH (Num. 16:4-11).

The first thing that this meekest of all men did, was to humble himself before the Lord *and before the people, and to pray!* There is a wealth of meaning in verse 4. And let all of us compare what Moses did with what we do when people bring a false charge against us. Or better still, compare our reaction with what the Lord did when false charges were brought against him.

The next thing that he did was to tell Korah that they would let the Lord show whom He had chosen to lead the nation. (See verses 5-7, read and explain.)

And then the third thing that Moses did was to rebuke Korah because he was not humbled and honored and satisfied that the Lord had given him any place of service. Note Moses' words in verses 8 through 11.

The Levites were divided into three large families: the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the sons of Merari. And if you look back to Numbers 3, verses 30 and 31 you will find that the Kohathites of which Korah was a member, were responsible for the ark of the covenant, the table of show-bread, the lampstands, the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense, the instruments that were used with these pieces which occupied the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. The laver was probably included, and the curtain at the entrance of the Tabernacle, as well as the veil between the holy place and the holy of holies. If one of the families of Levi was given the place of special honor, it was the Kohathites.

Notice that verses 9, 10, and 11 are questions. And they were questions which Korah needed to answer.

Next Moses called for Dathan and Abiram, Korah's co-conspirators.

III. MOSES' CALL FOR DATHAN AND ABIRAM, AND THEIR REFUSAL TO COME (Num. 16:12-14).

They not only refused to come, but rebuked Moses because they said that he had not done what he said that he was going to do.

So one thing was very clear to Moses. It was that neither Korah, nor Dathan, nor Abiram, nor the two hundred and fifty princes were repentant for what they had done. And so their intent was still to get rid of Moses and Aaron.

And so now we see:

IV. THE ANGER OF MOSES (Num. 16:15-19).

Here the meekest of all men becomes very angry. This is righteous indignation.

First, Moses expressed his anger to the Lord in prayer. See verse 15.

Then Moses expressed his anger to Korah, telling him and the two hundred and fifty princes to take their censers, put fire in them, and add the incense (which none but the priests were to do), and to come and stand at the entrance of the Tabernacle (as though they were prepared to go in, which none but priests were allowed to do).

But what must have been to Korah's amazement, the glory of the Lord suddenly appeared, and what follows shows:

V. THE ANGER OF THE LORD (Num. 16:20-35).

In the Lord's words to Moses and Aaron, although a relatively small group was in rebellion against the Lord, and against Moses and Aaron, yet we see that the whole nation was somewhat sympathetic with Korah, which the Lord knew, and so again the Lord was ready to destroy the whole nation.

But again Moses acted as a mediator between God and the nation. And we see from Moses' argument which he presented to the Lord in prayer,

that Korah was the one responsible for the whole rebellion. He was the leaven who was rapidly “leavening” the whole nation!

And so the Lord spared the nation, but not Korah, nor Dathan, nor Abiram.

(Read verses 23 through 35.)

The likes of the judgment that was executed upon Korah, and Dathan, and Abiram, and their families, had never been executed before. The Lord was seeking to teach His people that they needed to fear Him instead of daring to rebel against Him. And the two hundred and fifty princes were killed by fire which came out from the Lord.

In this connection let me remind you of two verses that we had recently in our study of the book of Hebrews: one, Hebrews 10:31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”; and second, Hebrews 12:29, “For our God is a consuming fire.”

How long the Lord is going to put up with our rebellion against Him, I don’t know. But the Lord is not ignoring the wicked things that we do. Why is it that we are giving copies of the Koran to the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, and not giving them translations of the Bible in Arabic? And at the same time that we are sealing the eternal doom of the enemy under our control when we could be pointing them to Christ, we are doing everything to keep our children in our schools from having anything to do with the Bible, or with God, or with Christ, and penalizing anyone who dares to pray on school grounds or in school activities.

I am not going to deal with verses 36 through 40 except to point out that the censers were melted down, and the gold from them made into plates to cover the altar (of burnt offering) that it might be a reminder that no one in the future would ever try to be like Korah. If God judged such a violation of His will in such a drastic way in the past, you can be sure that He will do the same if it ever occurs again. Any person who violates any part of the Word of God, is treading on the most dangerous ground.

But I do want to point out to you what happened on the very next day after the death of the families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and the death by fire of the two hundred and fifty princes. Verse 41 begins, “But on the morrow . . .” What did the people do? They blamed Moses and

Aaron for the death of those three families and the princes of Israel. And verse 42 tells us that the whole congregation “gathered against Moses and Aaron,” apparently to kill them, when what happened? “The glory of the Lord appeared.” And again the Lord was ready to destroy the nation. But Moses and Aaron were again on their faces before the Lord. So God spared the nation but 14,700 died in a plague before it was stopped.

Concl: What an illustration of the utter stupidity and corruption of the human heart! And the fact that Jude issued a warning against all who follow “the gainsaying of Core” (Korah) is an indication that in every generation, down to the present time, and on to the end of time, people are going to be engaged in talking back to God, forgetting what happened to Korah and his friends, and what can still happen to those who do what Korah did.

Let us pray that the Lord would deliver us from such an evil heart, that we would fear the Lord, and seek by His grace to always do the things that are pleasing in His sight, all of which has been carefully written out for us in our Bibles, the living Word of the living God, which is also the unchanging Word of the unchanging God.