

Bible Study

DRAFT

The Korah Rebellion: A Real-Life Warning

By Craig M White

Version 1.2

“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” (Ephesians 5:11, ESV)

Introduction

The Korah rebellion in Numbers 16 is like a flashing warning sign for church ministers.

In principle, of course, this tragic lesson can apply to anyone – but it is chiefly aimed at ministers disloyal to their overarching leaders. It’s a story about pride, ambition, and going against God’s plan, showing what happens when ministers lose sight of their real job: serving others humbly. Let’s dive into what Korah did and why it’s a lesson for ministers today.

Korah was a Levite, which meant he was involved with Israel’s worship of God (Numbers 16:8–10). But he wasn’t satisfied and garnered 250 leaders to back him up in challenging Moses and Aaron in their positions (Numbers 16:3) who they claimed went too far. They wanted independence or further autonomy to enable them to run things their way and not the way of God and the church’s leaders. This wasn’t just a complaint—it was a full-on rejection and undermining of God’s chosen leaders in senior positions. It’s like a minister today ignoring their church council, board or senior leaders because they want more control, independence or further decentralisation, and to run things their way. This results in the harassment of those loyal to the leaders. And the appointment of sycophants rather than those with the ability, resulting in a lifeless and fruitless church. As if they care. After all, they still get paid – much like Korah continuing on in his position for some time until caught out.

The Bible calls ministers to be like shepherds, serving with humility (1 Peter 5:2–3). Korah’s rebellion is a picture of what happens when a minister does the opposite—stirring up trouble – however silently and subtly against the central leadership - instead of building up their local church and of caring for people. Korah caused drama, just like a minister who chases personal goals or ignores accountability fractures their church. Leading so many astray means that it was all about himself and not about others who he obviously disdained and hated.

The big question is “How did Korah get to the position he did to sway so many?” He must have been subtly manoeuvring behind the scenes, gathering forces and isolating or even removing those loyal to the rulers. Slander would have been the order of the day.

Perhaps it is answered by comments made by one minister many years ago: referring to a trainee, he stated that he “was pretending to be something he wasn’t.” That can take many

forms into the ministry of such a one including going on “power trips” and harassing people they are jealous of; or covering up and being covered up for their incompetence and laziness by their buddies.

A Wake-Up Call for Ministers

Korah’s big mistake was acting like a ring-leader of other ministers and those they are close to, neglecting his actual job. Instead of doing his Levite duties, he started a revolt, leading others down the wrong path. Ministers can fall into this trap too, slacking on in-depth teaching, guiding, or caring for their people while chasing their own dreams. This kind of neglect undermines the church’s unity, just like Korah’s actions shook up Israel.

God didn’t mess around with Korah’s rebellion—the earth swallowed him and his family, and fire took out the 250 rebels (Numbers 16:31–35). It’s a heavy reminder that God takes central leadership seriously (like an international board, council of elders and association constitution, bylaws, fundamentals of belief, ministerial handbook, policies and overall church culture). Korah’s attempt to undermine those because they lean toward their own understanding. Today, ministers who rebel might not face earthquakes, but they can cause trust to crumble, divide the church, or destroy its spiritual energy.

Sadly, they will face a future judgment for their attitude, pretending to be invincible priests who are always backed up by their buddies.

On the flip side, Jesus showed what real leadership looks like—washing His disciples’ feet and serving with love (John 13:14–15). Ministers are supposed to follow that example, working humbly under their church’s senior leadership, including those based far away, even overseas. Korah’s story warns ministers to ditch pride and ambition, stick to their calling, and serve the local congregation with love to keep it strong and united.

An Analysis and Relevance for Today

The Basic Issue?

The story of Korah’s rebellion in Numbers 16 is a serious story from the Bible that shows what happens when church leaders go rogue. It’s about Korah, a Levite (like a local pastor), teaming up with some fellows to challenge Moses and Aaron’s leadership during the Israelites’ desert days. This constituted a mix of defiance, hypocrisy, and power grabs that we can still see in churches today. Let’s break down what Korah and his followers did and how it connects to ministers who stir up trouble by ignoring their senior leadership team (even if based overseas), their church’s rules or culture, playing favourites, or twisting the truth.

Modern Korah’s play the victim pretending that they are the ones suffering – instead of admitting their problems and apologising. They abuse others and then run around to family, key members and fellow ministers (who are of the view that ministers must always be believed and backed up regardless), claiming to be the ones being harmed when you start a fight you can’t finish, the often-used ploy is to cry victim. A common tactic of these sorts.

They cry the victim to their family, ministerial friends and those they appoint to positions.

Pushing Back Against Leadership

Korah, along with Dathan, Abiram, and 250 other leaders and probably other congregants, had the audacity to question Moses and Aaron, saying, “Why do you guys think you’re so special?”

(Numbers 16:3, NKJV). It's like a pastor today deciding to ignore their church's rules or leadership team because they think they know better and prefer to act like control freaks. Instead of working together, they push their own plans, causing chaos and division – much like those refusing to acknowledge their leadership, refuse training, policies, handbook and overall church culture (or way of doing things) and direction. They knew better and wanted to run things their way. To be stricter and inaugurate a buddy system that corrupts the body. Korah wasn't trying to fix things—he wanted to take over, just like some ministers chase their own goals instead of sticking to what's best for everyone.

Korah's followers acted like they were all about fairness or greater independence, shouting, "Everyone's holy, not just you!" (Numbers 16:3). But really, they were just looking out for themselves. This is like ministers who say one thing but do another—setting strict rules for some people while letting their friend's or sycophants' slide. This kind of double standard splits the church, as they play favorites and make it hard for anyone to trust them. Korah used the "we're all equal" card to gain support, but it was just a trick to grab power.

Twisting the Truth

Korah didn't play fair—he spread half-truths to make Moses and Aaron look bad, conveniently leaving out that God picked them for the job. Some ministers do the same, gossiping or sharing just enough information to make others doubt good leaders, senior men or ruling boards/councils (or members). It's sneaky, like setting someone up to fail while keeping their hands clean – they do this by stirring up family members, church allies and other ministers against the innocent party without their knowledge that a storm to oust them was brewing. They keep themselves distant from the action by operating one or two layers of gossip or slander beneath the surface. It is a clever, but evil strategy. Most folks in the church might not even notice this behind-the-scenes drama, which makes it extra dangerous.

Jealousy and Fake Leadership vs True Godly Leadership

Korah became competitive and jealous and wanted Aaron's priest role too (Numbers 16:8–10). You see this in ministers who aren't happy with their job and get envious of others' roles. To cover it up, they might lean on their friends for support instead of sticking to solid Bible teaching. It's all about looking legitimate without doing the real work of leading with heart and truth.

The worst part? Korah twisted God's Word to make his rebellion sound okay, acting like any authority was fine as long as people followed it. Some ministers pull this stunt too, saying the Bible's all about obeying them, even when they're way off track. This flips the truth upside down—real leadership follows God, His Word, and the church's central or senior leadership team (Acts 15:22–29). When ministers demand blind loyalty despite shady behavior, they're repeating Korah's mistake and leading people astray.

They teach that members must follow and obey regardless of ministerial problems because it is test from God that we obey His ministers – a bit like the military. Some of these members then become spies, waiting for their inevitable 'brownie points'.

Korah's break agreements, are headstrong and belligerent like little children, refusing to apologise for offenses, abuses and messing things up.

The Bible's clear: real leaders follow God and His Word, truly believing in the doctrines and teaching them in detail. Moses was always seeking God for guidance (Exodus 3:4–6; Numbers 12:6–8). The New Testament backs this up, telling us to check leaders against Scripture and call out those who don't measure up (1 Timothy 3:1–7; 2 Peter 2:1–3). Ministers need to answer to God, the Bible, and their church's leadership, not just do whatever they want. Not act independently yet drawing a salary for a job they don't fulfill and don't believe in. Korah's story is a big red flag for leaders who put themselves first instead of serving with integrity.

Sycophants and Church Trouble

Sometimes, church folks get sucked into supporting a minister who's dropping the ball or ignoring the church's rules, just to score some favour. They are not standing up for what's right - they're playing the "yes-man" game to get on the minister's good side. It's like a sneaky version of Korah's rebellion, where they back someone who's causing trouble instead of supporting the church's mission. They are told all sorts of things against members which they believe and thus are set up to act against the member. Their minds have been infiltrated and twisted by such tactics. They might even act like spies, passing along gossip or half-truths to undermine anti-Korah's, which stirs up drama and division. They do this to gain favours and 'opportunities' to serve (ie give sermonettes or in hope to be noticed for future ordinations). Their behaviours are reprehensible and scatters the flock.

These supporters often buy into the minister's story without checking the facts, helping spread lies or twisted info. It's not as loud as Korah's in-your-face rebellion, but it's just as harmful, chipping away at the church's unity and trust. It is a devious and subtle approach, much like Satan's (see Genesis 3:1; II Corinthians 11:3; Acts 13:16).

They teach their followers and sycophants not to support the overarching leaders but to demonstrate loyalty to themselves. And to never do anything about abuse and corruption etc as Christ will sort it out. In due course, even if it takes years and decades.

What Happens When You Enable Trouble

Korah's group faced serious consequences for their rebellion, and enabling a bad minister today can do real damage too. It breaks trust, weakens the church's vibe, and can split people apart. When members are taught to blindly back a minister who is off track, they make it easier for that minister to keep messing up, hurting the church even more. But this is how the minister and his buddies keep their jobs and undermine leadership.

It is due to this that the led to apostasy with members fleeing the Korah figure only to find themselves in the arms of apostates.

To avoid this mess, church members need to stay sharp and stick to the truth – to God and true, faithful leaders. Don't just take a minister's word for it—check their actions against the Bible and the church's rules (Proverbs 18:17). Support the church's leadership team when they're trying to keep things on track. If a minister's not doing their job, the ruling board needs to step in, and members shouldn't get in the way.

Prayer and contemplation are very important too. Korah's rebellion was really about rejecting God, and today's drama often comes from not seeking His guidance. Pray for wisdom to spot the truth, guts to call it out, and humility to stick with godly leadership, even when it's tough.

Conclusions

Korah's story is a wake-up call for churches today. When members back a minister who's ignoring their duties or going against the church's senior or international leadership just to gain favour, they're stirring up trouble in a Korah-like way.

Modern Korah's are a gang of local or regional men and their somewhat naïve followers who are led astray in their folly.

Standing up to Korah's is a Christian duty as a warrior for Christ – siding with the senior leadership, the doctrines, policies and way of the Church is the direct OPPOSITE to the Korah attitude.

One way to spot a Korah is if you are loyal to the actual policies and practices of the Church and its overarching leaders under Christ. They will try and get rid of you so that you cannot report their subtle rebelliousness. If they cannot get you on something, they will fabricate something else. This is a common practice against the loyal or those they are jealous of.

Instead, everyone should focus on truth, support accountability, and keep the church strong and united. Korah's rebellion also shows ministers what not to do—don't defy the rules, or play two-faced games, or spread lies, or demand blind loyalty. Real leaders follow God, stick to His Word, and serve with humility, keeping the church a place of truth and togetherness. Otherwise they become a wolf serving Korah.

Finally let us learn the lesson and emulate Korah's descendants and obey God and the international leadership team. See Psalm 42:1; 44:2; 45:1; 46:1; 47:1; 48:1; 49:1; 84:1; 85:1; 87:1 where the faithful are used of God in relevant capacities by not following the ways of Korah, their ancestor.

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore **we ought to support people like these**, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. *[we all have a part to play in the Church]* I have written something to the church, but **Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.** *[how like Korah]* So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, **he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.** *[this is so true as subtle as it is to the naïve. One rule for their favourites and another for the loyal]* Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true *[much like senior ministers .can be character witness against the modern-day Korah/Diotrephes]”* (III John 1:4-12)

Appendix. Korah in Jude and Numbers 16

Jude 1:4-16

Jud 1:4 For certain people **have crept in unnoticed** who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jud 1:5 Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

Jud 1:6 And the angels who **did not stay within their own position of authority**, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—

Jud 1:7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Jud 1:8 Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, **reject authority**, and blaspheme the glorious ones.

Jud 1:9 But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.”

Jud 1:10 But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

Jud 1:11 Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error **and perished in Korah's rebellion**.

Jud 1:12 These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted;

Jud 1:13 wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

Jud 1:14 It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones,

Jud 1:15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

Jud 1:16 These are grumblers, **malcontents**, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, **showing favoritism to gain advantage**.

The complete story in Numbers:

Num 16:1 “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.

Num 16:2 **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.**

Num 16:3 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?”**

Num 16:4 When Moses heard it, he fell on his face,

Num 16:5 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.

Num 16:6 Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company;

Num 16:7 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!”

Num 16:8 And Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi:

Num 16:9 **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,**

Num 16:10 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?

Num 16:11 Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?”

Num 16:12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and they said, “We will not come up.

Num 16:13 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?

Num 16:14 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.”

Num 16:15 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.”

Num 16:16 And Moses said to Korah, “Be present, you and all your company, before the LORD, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow.

Num 16:17 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.”

Num 16:18 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.

Num 16:19 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.

Num 16:20 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

Num 16:21 “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.”

Num 16:22 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?”

Num 16:23 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:24 “Say to the congregation, Get away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.”

Num 16:25 Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him.

Num 16:26 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.”

Num 16:27 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.

Num 16:28 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.

Num 16:29 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.

Num 16:30 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.”

Num 16:31 And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart.

Num 16:32 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.

Num 16:33 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.”

Num 16:34 And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up!”

Num 16:35 And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.

Num 16:36 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:37 “Tell Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest to take up the censers out of the blaze. Then scatter the fire far and wide, for they have become holy.

Num 16:38 As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they offered them before the LORD, and they became holy. Thus they shall be a sign to the people of Israel.”

Num 16:39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned had offered, and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar,

Num 16:40 to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the LORD, lest he become like Korah and his company—as the LORD said to him through Moses.

Num 16:41 But on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of the LORD.”

Num 16:42 And when the congregation had assembled against Moses and against Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting. And behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.

Num 16:43 And Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting,

Num 16:44 and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:45 “Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” And they fell on their faces.

Num 16:46 And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, **for wrath has gone out from the LORD; the plague has begun.**”

Num 16:47 So Aaron took it as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people.

Num 16:48 And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped.

Num 16:49 Now those who died in the plague were 14,700, besides those who died in the affair of Korah.

Num 16:50 And Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, when the plague was stopped.

Appendix. Korah's Rebellion by Michael Evans

After sending out the article, Michael Evans sent me this e-mail that gels with my article. He stated: "Craig, thought I'd share this - from 5 years ago."

Subject: Korah's rebellion

please give this your consideration, and share with anyone who might be interested. Michael

The only High Priest we have is Jesus Christ – after the order of Melchizedek – and **all** members of His Body are trainees to be priests and kings under Him. The ministry do not share the platform with Him (that was Moses' sin – "shall **we** bring water out of the rock ..."). The ministry's job is to teach the Word of God accurately – to encourage the people to live by it and to have faith in our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Korah's sin was that he coveted the priesthood. He was not content with just being a Levite. The Levites were given the job to serve at the tabernacle and stand in between the people and God so the people did not get zapped – because *the people were not holy*. They were a "rebellious house" with no heart to follow God. Korah claimed, falsely, that "all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them." God distanced Himself from them so as not to destroy them – Moses interceded to ask God not to destroy them all, more than once. They could only access God through the Aaronic priesthood that was supported and served by the Levites.

Numbers 1⁴⁷ But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe; ⁴⁸for the Lord had spoken to Moses, saying: ⁴⁹"Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; ⁵⁰**but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle.** ⁵¹And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. ⁵²The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; ⁵³**but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel;** and the Levites shall keep^[d] charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony."

The priesthood was given **by God** to Aaron and his sons – who were Levites, but not all Levites had the right to be priests, or become the High Priest. All these things were a type – a shadow, of what was to come. There has been a change in this law of priesthood – Hebrews 7:12 – and now we have a new High Priest, Jesus Christ alone, not after the Aaronic line, but after Melchizedek. There are no other priests assisting Jesus as His vicars – although *we can all perform priestly functions as intercessors – through prayer for others – but only through our High Priest, Jesus.* **Ministers who see themselves as "servants of Melchizedek" assisting Him in His job as High priest – and having an office to be a kind of "lower down the chain priest", in a kind of priestly hierarchy, really have the same problem as Korah. They are claiming to have an office that is not theirs. It is coveting the priesthood like Korah. When challenged about this, they can react like Ahab did to Elijah – accusing him of troubling Israel - by criticising**

his, Ahab's behaviour (that was the real cause of the nation's problems, and the chastisement through drought).

We are warned by Paul in Acts 20 that men would "rise up" – elevate themselves over the assembly – and distort the Scriptures to draw disciples after themselves. On leaving the Ephesian elders, Paul commended them to God, and "the word of His grace" – not to any particular man, or leader to follow.

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