

"Lessons on Grace from Korah"

Numbers 3, 4, 16, 26; 1 Chron. 6, 9

I ended last week's message from Num. 16 stating that God longs to forgive and restore. We're going to review some of Num. 16 with a little more background but we'll end by talking about what God graciously did for and through Korah's descendants. Korah's descendants? Didn't they all die when the earth opened up? I'll leave that 'cliff-hanger' ending for later.

Perhaps you're confused about the message title: lessons on grace from Korah. God is a gracious God, even in judgment. There are several things we can learn about God's grace in the Korah narrative. Korah rounded up many leaders to oppose Moses and Aaron. Let's review 16:1

Korah ... and certain Reubenites—Dathan and Abiram, ... became insolent² and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council.³ They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"

Korah managed to convince 250 leaders of Israel that Moses misled them and that he and Aaron had placed themselves in charge, none of which was true. He was correct in that God had set apart the nation for himself and He had graciously set apart a few with specific ministries and responsibilities, including Korah himself. Korah was a Kohathite. Kohath was one of Levi's three sons. The Levites did not receive an inheritance of land from God. Instead, God set them apart for handling the Tabernacle. Korah was unhappy and unappreciative of God's grace in His life. So this is a great lesson to remind ourselves of:

Appreciate God's Gifts of Grace in Your Life **(3:27-32)**

After Moses and Aaron prayed to God, Moses confronted Korah and said in 16:7,

You Levites have gone too far!"⁸ Moses also said to Korah, "Now listen, you Levites!⁹ Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the Lord's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them?¹⁰ He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too.¹¹ It is against the Lord that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"

Korah failed to appreciate that God had already set him apart and given him a ministry that others would have loved to have. Go back to Ch. 3:27-32,

²⁷ To Kohath belonged the clans of the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites and Uzzielites; these were the Kohathite clans. ²⁸ The number of all the males a month old or more was 8,600. The Kohathites were responsible for the care of the sanctuary. ²⁹ The Kohathite clans were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. ³⁰ The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. ³¹ They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in

ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use. ³² The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest. He was appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the sanctuary.

Kohath was the second of three sons. Usually, the firstborn often gets the bigger responsibilities. Gershon was the firstborn and:

^{3:25} At the Tent of Meeting the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, ²⁶ the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes—and everything related to their use.

Curtains – that doesn't sound exciting. What about little brother, Merari. What did they get to do?

^{3:36} The Merarites were appointed to take care of the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment, and everything related to their use, ³⁷ as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs and ropes.

Tent pegs, posts and ropes. But, they were God's tent pegs, posts and curtains. While the Merarites may not have had the most glamorous responsibility, you couldn't set up the Tabernacle without them. Theirs was a background ministry that very few saw but everyone appreciated when nothing fell down. The Gershonites then covered everything with the proper tent coverings now giving it identity. Once that was all in place then the Kohathites did their job putting all the furniture in the proper place. When everyone did their ministry, then the Tabernacle was ready for Aaron, his sons and the Levites to assist Aaron & his sons with the sacrifices. But Korah wasn't content with background ministry. All ministry is important. All believers are needed. Everyone has a role to play and when we all work together God is glorified.

Appreciating God's grace gifts in our life applies to everything we have. We didn't deserve to be created and have a life. Our spouses and children are God's gifts to us. Our jobs, homes, the community where we live, the time we live in, each day is a gift from God. And the greatest gift, salvation.

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

We also learn this lesson from Korah:

Heed the Warnings of Grace **(Num. 4:17-20)**

Since God knows we have sinful hearts and we can want more than what He's given us, He gives us warnings in the bible so we don't experience pain and the result of sinful choices. God gave the Kohathites this warning in Ch. 4 after He told them their role in Ch. 3, He warned them in Ch. 4.

^{4:17} The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ¹⁸ "See that the Kohathite tribal clans are not cut off from the Levites. ¹⁹ So that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry. ²⁰ But the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die."

Korah wanted Aaron's role. Aaron got to see and handle the holy things, [Menorah, Table of showbread, Altar of incense and even the Ark of the Covenant once a year). Just prior to these verses, God explained through Moses the care-ful preparation the Kohathites had to do in handling the Tabernacle furniture. Aaron and his sons were to cover it and then the Kohathites could carry it on poles. Korah's desire to be in Aaron's place meant he would see and touch the holy furniture. However, God had specifically warned them that they would die if they did.

Warnings are there to prevent us from pain or worse. Wear seat belts. Don't text and drive. Stay away from live wires. Don't touch a hot stove. Why? Because there are painful consequences. The Word of God gives us many spiritual warnings so we will avoid the consequences of sin. God gives these warnings out of love for us. Proverbs warns us about adultery,

Prov. 5:7 Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say. ⁸ Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, ⁹ lest you lose your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel, ¹⁰ lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich the house of another. ¹¹ At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. ¹² You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction!

He counters that with loving the one you're married to:

¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. ¹⁶ Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? ¹⁷ Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. ¹⁸ May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

Appreciate God's gift of your spouse. Don't fantasize about someone else because when you do you damage the bond you have with your spouse.

The Bible is full of warnings. Warnings are gifts of grace from God to say, 'Don't go there, you will get hurt and hurt others.' Paul says this very thing in 1 Cor. 10:6

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. ¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Korah's desires were selfish. He wasn't content with what God gave him. When we come to the judgment of Korah, there's a different aspect of grace that we need to understand and that is we need to

Understand the Grace & Mercy of Judgment **(16:16-38)**

16:16 Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers are to appear before the Lord tomorrow—you and they and Aaron. ¹⁷ Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it—250 censers in all—and present it before the Lord. You and Aaron are to present your censers also." ¹⁸ So each man took his censer, put fire and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁹ When Korah had gathered all his

followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the glory of the Lord appeared to the entire assembly. ²⁰ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²¹ "Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."

²² But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and cried out, "O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?"

Moses appeals to God, who again seemed ready to destroy 'the entire assembly', and reminds God of His own words, when God was thinking of destroying the nation after they listened to the bad report from the spies about Canaan in

^{14:17} "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: ¹⁸ 'The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and for-giving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.' ¹⁹ In accordance with your great love, for-give the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." ²⁰ The Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. ²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, ²² not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— ²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

Some interpret v.18 as God continues to punish the father's sins on the 3rd and 4th generations. What it says is that He doesn't leave the guilty unpunished. True, children and grandchildren can suffer the consequences of sinful choices that their parents have made, but Moses understood this and applied it here in Num. 16 that God won't punish the unguilty. Perhaps he means He punishes the children to the 3rd and 4th generation if they repeat the sins of their ancestors. Suffering the consequences of someone else's sins is not the same as being punished for their sin. Moses' appeal to God is that only the guilty get punished.

I lean toward this because of other Scripture. Even in Deut. 24:16

¹⁶ Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.

So God specifically names the guilty parties in 16:21

²³ Then the Lord said to Moses, ²⁴ "Say to the assembly, 'Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'" ²⁵ Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶ He warned the assembly, "Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins." ²⁷ So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents.

²⁸ Then Moses said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: ²⁹ If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the Lord has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt."

³¹ As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. ³³ They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone

from the community. ³⁴ At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, “The earth is going to swallow us too!”

³⁵ And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

God in His grace took the lives of these people so their sinful influence wouldn't hinder His plan to get Israel to the land of Canaan. Had Korah succeeded, it would have ruined the priestly line, which God had promised to Aaron and his descendants. Judgment was also an act of mercy that God did not wipe out more. And, He even spared some of the line of Korah because when we come to Num. 26 and the census taken 38 years later before going into the land of Canaan with Joshua we read this:

^{26:8} The son of Pallu was Eliab, ⁹ and the sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan and Abiram. The same Dathan and Abiram were the community officials who rebelled against Moses and Aaron and were among Korah's followers when they rebelled against the Lord. ¹⁰ The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah, whose followers died when the fire devoured the 250 men. And they served as a warning sign. ¹¹ The line of Korah, however, did not die out.

How? God showed mercy and grace to his family. Perhaps one or some of his sons did not join him in his rebellion. The only sure thing is that God showed grace and mercy in judgment. The survival of Korah's line teaches us to

Accept Restorative Grace **(1 Chron. 6:22-28)**

The book of Chronicles was written after the exiles were allowed to return to Israel from Babylonian captivity, after 536 BC. Chronicles was written to encourage the Israelites to regroup and establish the sacrificial system in the rebuilt temple. That meant sorting out all the tribes and all the Levites for the priesthood and all the descendants of Levi's three sons (Gershon, Kohath and Merari) to continue their specific roles in the Temple, similar to what they did in the Tabernacle. In 1 Chron. 6:22-28) we have a list of Korah's descendants.

²² The descendants of Kohath: Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, ²³ Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir his son, ²⁴ Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziyah his son and Shaul his son.

²⁵ The descendants of Elkanah: Amasai, Ahimoth, ²⁶ Elkanah his son, Zophai his son, Nahath his son, ²⁷ Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son and Samuel his son. ²⁸ The sons of Samuel: Joel the firstborn and Abijah the second son.

This is the prophet Samuel because we know from 1 Sam. 8:1 that he only had two sons named Joel and Abijah. And in v.33 we read that Joel's son was Heman the musician, who we read in v.39 was a close associate of Asaph. Heman and Asaph are credited with writing some of the psalms. And over in 1 Chron. 9 we read about other descendants of Korah,

¹⁹ Shallum son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his fellow gatekeepers from his family (the Korahites) were responsible for guarding the thresholds of the Tent just as their fathers had been responsible for guarding the entrance to the dwelling of the Lord. ²⁰ In earlier times Phinehas son of Eleazar was in charge of the gatekeepers, and the Lord was with him. ²¹ Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was the gatekeeper at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

²⁴ The gatekeepers were on the four sides: east, west, north and south. ²⁵ Their brothers in their villages had to come from time to time and share their duties for seven-day periods.

²⁸ Some of them were in charge of the articles used in the temple service; they counted them when they were brought in and when they were taken out. ²⁹ Others were assigned to take care of the furnishings and all the other articles of the sanctuary, as well as the flour and wine, and the oil, incense and spices. ³⁰ But some of the priests took care of mixing the spices. ³¹ A Levite named Mattithiah, the firstborn son of Shallum the Korahite, was entrusted with the responsibility for baking the offering bread. ³² Some of their Kohathite brothers were in charge of preparing for every Sabbath the bread set out on the table.

God showed restorative grace to Korah's descendants, continuing to use them for the purpose of worship and care for the Temple just as they began at the Tabernacle. But there's one more amazing sign of grace. There are 11 psalms that are attributed to being written or composed by the sons of Korah. And when we look at the subtitle of their first one, Ps. 42 we read "For the director of music, a maskil of the sons of Korah." Maskil means, instruction. God in His grace did not wipe out the line of Korah. Rather he raised up great leaders from his sons, people who still got to be involved in the presence of God and being involved in worship to help instruct the people of God about who He is and what He can do for you.

But here's the challenge for us. Will we accept God's restorative grace in a brother or sister's life who have sinned in the past but now God has restored? Or do we hold that sin against them forever? Do we hold back grace from people's family members who had nothing to do with their parents' sins or their parent never repented?

And what about accepting God's restorative grace for ourselves? Because God does mercifully spare His people from the consequences of their sin at times, brings them back to Himself and yet they can't forgive themselves and struggle to receive restorative grace?

col. 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.