

Rebellion/Bitterness is as the Sin of Witchcraft – *Parashat Korach*

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the יהוה, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (1 Sam 15:23, KJV)

"For rebellion is like the sin of sorcery, stubbornness like the crime of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of יהוה, he too has rejected you as king." (CJB)

A Synopsis of the Rebellion

How justified was the יהוה's death sentence to the generation of people who rejected the land in Nu. 16:31-35? Was it too sweeping? They could not all have been as rebellious as it seemed. Or were they?

This week's parasha illustrates how far the seeds of rebellion had spread in the camp of the Israelites. The problem was more serious than many of us have imagined. In this portion, we will see how just one incident of mutiny multiplied itself and resulted in the deaths of nearly 15,000 Israelites-and the forty years of wandering had only just begun!

First: The Challengers

There were three sets of people who had set out to challenge the leadership of *Moshe* and Aaron according to verses 16:1-3. First, we have *Korach*, the leader of the rebellion. Being a Levite, he was a close relative of *Moshe* and Aaron. This fact comes into play when we examine his challenge.

Next, there were people from the tribe of *Reuven*. Is there significance in this? *Reuven* was the firstborn of the sons of Jacob. As such, he was normally entitled to the inheritance and family leadership. But, according to Genesis 49, he was bypassed in favor of Joseph and Judah. This detail also will have significance in their challenge.

The problem of these malcontents is magnified when we remember that *Korach* was from the *Kohatites*. According to the camp arrangements, they encamped and journeyed very close to the *Reuvenites*. Both were located next to each other on the south side of the *Mishkan*.

The third set of people is the 250 who stood with *Korach*, Dathan, and Abiram. We are told that the 250 people were: "...men from the children of Israel, leaders of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown." (Numbers 16:2)

In some respects this is the same description for that of the spies. Both were some sort of leaders, *anashim*. Furthermore, they all had a name for themselves. The Hebrew text says literally, 'men of a name.' This means that many knew of them, they were popular in Israel. Finally, being men (*anashim*), they fell into the category of men whom *Rashi* defines as 'worthy men.'

From this description, it seems that some of these 250 were members of the *Sanhedrin* – chosen rulers of Israel whose purpose, according to *Bamidbar* 11:16, was to assist *Moshe* in ruling Israel. These then, are the leaders of this latest mutiny among the children of Israel. What was their problem?

Second: The Contention—Contentions Always Spiral Down

These challengers complained to *Moshe* and Aaron in verse 16:3 that they took too much power upon themselves. Here were two brothers, one was the spiritual leader, and the other was the prophet or lawgiver-the two highest positions in the nation. Our challengers accused them of: "...selfishly taking

power and prestige for themselves at the expense of the rest of the nation which was just as qualified as they (...for the entire assembly—are holy).” Korach and his conspirators posed a challenge regarding the authority of Moshe and Aaron and may have felt and thought that they had a monopoly in the national leadership.

Dathan and Abiram had two problems with Moshe. They felt that he *dominated* them, making himself the ruler over them. They stated the second problem like this: “*You did not bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey nor give us heritage or vineyard. [Instead], You brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to die in the wilderness.*” (*Bamidbar 16:13-14*)

Notice the change in wording in all of Israel’s rebellions so far. The first rebellions were spurred on out of fear of hunger or starvation. Then their perception of the reality of their freedom and seemingly insecure life in the wilderness gradually worsened, as the children of Israel made pleas to go back to Egypt, lest they die in the wilderness. Getting worse yet, in Bamidbar chapter 11, they cried out for the *free* Egyptian fish. Now, in this *parasha*, the complainers take their obstinacy even further by referring to Egypt in the same way יהוה referred to the Promised Land. It is a complete reversal. It represents the new depth into which the mutiny had sunk.

A Missing Link

The word translated rebellion in 1 Sam. 15:23 and in Nu. 17:10 (*Bamidbar 17:25*) is the Hebrew word *meri-i* (מְרִי), which is Strong’s 4805 *meriy* or *mer-ee’*. It comes from Strong’s 4784 *marah* (מָרָה), bitterness, i.e. (figuratively) rebellion; concretely, bitter, or rebellious. It is translated in the KJV as bitter, (most) rebel (-lion, -lious). Davka translates 4805 as rebelliousness. And Davka translates 4784 as bitter, embittered, acrid, acrimonious. It is translated in the KJV as bitter, (most) rebel (-lion, -lious).

Do you see what I see? There is a direct connection with what we call rebelliousness and what we call bitterness. In the Hebrew language, the connection is obvious, rebelliousness is derived from and a form of bitterness! In the Body of Messiah, we cannot afford to be bitter. Scripture likens bitterness/rebellion as the sin of witchcraft/sorcery. The *Torah* has a lot to say about this particular sin and those who practice it. In Exodus 22:18 it states: “*You shall not allow a sorceress to live.*” And in Deut. 18:10-12 it states; “¹⁰*There must not be found among you anyone who makes his son or daughter pass through fire, a diviner, a soothsayer, an enchanter, a sorcerer (a witch), ¹¹a spell-caster, a consulter of ghosts or spirits, or a necromancer. ¹²For whoever does these things is detestable to יהוה, and because of these abominations יהוה your Elohim is driving them out ahead of you.*”

I know all of you are saying to yourself “but we are not witches, and we do not practice those things.” And you are correct – to my knowledge there is no one in the congregation who practices any of those things. But are you bitter? Are you harboring unforgiveness in your heart of hearts towards anyone? It is not a surprise that Scripture reminds us: “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled*” (Hebrew 12:15). It is also no wonder that the Basic Seminar states that the top three root sins are: (1) Bitterness, (2) Immorality, and (3) Temporal Values or as Scripture defines it: “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world*” (1 John 2:16).

What is grace? Simply put grace is the power to do what we ought – the power G-d gives to do His Will. He wants His Will done. *Yeshua* told us in the disciple’s prayer on Matt. 6 that “*His Will Be Done!*” Why do we need to pray that His Will be done? Isn’t He strong enough to do His own Will? Rest assured, He is. But He is a gentleman, and has given us free moral agency. He will not force His

Will upon us. It is up to us to do it, with a happy heart. That is why we need His Grace. It gives us the desire and the power to do His Will. Scriptures states: *“But by G-d’s grace I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain; on the contrary, I have worked harder than all of them, although it was not I but the grace of G-d with me”* (1 Cor. 15:10). And also *“¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”* (Phil. 2:13). The fundamental concept behind G-d’s grace is that it is about what He wants and not what we want. It is about seeing life through His perspective and not ours (see Isaiah 55:9 *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*)

Are you bitter? You are in danger of being judged as rebellious and a doer of sorcery. Is being angry with someone worth the chance of such a judgment? What happened to *Korach* and his followers? They died. And so will anyone who harbors bitterness. Ultimately, you will rebel against G-d because His Way is the Way of Forgiveness. Here is reminder of seven steps we learned last year in the Seminar to turn bitterness into forgiveness. Are you ready to release your offender into the hands of a Living G-d? I certainly pray so...

Seven Steps to Turn Bitterness into Forgiveness

1. Repent of Temporal Values

The very fact that we are bitter, you see, no matter what people do to damage us, no matter what — damage our bodies, damage our possessions, damage our reputation is all temporal.

2. Recognize the Attitude of Ungratefulness

3. View the offender as God’s agent

If I am hurt by somebody, or damaged, or offended it is very easy for me to get bitter until I realize that I could in no way have been damaged by them unless God allowed them to get through to accomplish His purposes in my life. God knows how He can use even the wrath and the cheating of people to bring about the best in your life if we would only let Him.

4. Thank God for His ultimate purpose Through the Offenses (1 Thes. 5:18)

God is not telling us to be thankful; He is saying “In all things give thanks.” He didn’t say “In all things be thankful.” Instead He said “In all things give thanks.”

5. Comprehend the magnitude of our debt to God

People who wrong us they have a debt to us. But you know that compared to our debt to the Lord, it is little.

6. Realize that God will punish the offender (see the entire book of Psalms)

One of the reasons why we have to bring an offender to justice is because that is part of the healing in the one who has been offended. God is going to take care of their punishment, “Vengeance is mine I will repay saith the Lord.” He promises to do it. And since He is going to do that then...

7. Voluntarily invest a treasure in our offender