

## INTRODUCTION

What will you think of when you hear the word “authority?” It may remind you of someone who is an expert. Perhaps you have some severe illness. You will look for the authority in treating that disease. Maybe you are a researcher. You will compare your work with the leading authority in the same area. A person who has authority can also be someone who has power. Some of you came from a background where authority is seen as negative. It leads people to think of a dictator. But authority is a necessary thing to enable a leader to make decisions. We have a few business owners in our church. They exercise authority in the work place to direct their subordinates. Without question, God has authority over the universe in His hands. But He shares some of His authority to human leaders. In the passage today, some Israelites tried to seize authority from the leaders God chose. Some people spoke up to challenge Moses and Aaron. There was no mentioning of when this incident happened. It could have been some time after God declared His discipline of the 40 years of wilderness wandering. After all, who would dare to grumble soon after God had judged them? But as time went by, people returned to their old bad habit. They complained when things were not going their way. We shall learn in this passage that we must obey God's sovereignty before we will follow to men's leadership.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 挑戰的指控 Accusation

Poor Moses and Aaron were accused by their peers. Who were the accusers? Verse 1 tells us their names. There was Korah from the tribe of Levi. He was perhaps the main culprit in the accusation. According to the genealogy in Exodus 6, Korah was actually Moses and Aaron's cousin. Besides Korah, verse 1 also gives us three names from the tribe of Reuben. These four leaders ganged up with other people to accuse Moses and Aaron. Read **verse 2**: ... With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. There are three descriptions about the 250 men: well-known, leaders and appointed members. Therefore, they were recognized people in the community. Now they worked together to plot this conspiracy. What did they accuse Moses and Aaron about? Let us look at **verse 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?” The expression “You have gone too far!” is actually one word in the Hebrew text. It means “much.” The translation “you seize too much authority” in the Chinese Union Version is an appropriate interpretation. It was correct when the group said that every Israelite was holy and God was with them. God separated the Israelites from all other nations and chose them to be His own people. However, Moses and Aaron did not elevate themselves above others. It was God who put the two men at their leadership positions. Moses for one never wanted the job. When Moses was called by God in the burning bush, he made up a few excuses that he was unwilling to be the leader to bring his people out of Egypt. When we look at the Reubenites, we see that they came up with other more outrageous accusations. Moses invited them for a talk, but they refused to come. Instead, they told Moses in **verse 13**: “Isn't it

enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us?” Do their arguments sound familiar? Some people complained in chapter 11 that they had better food in Egypt when they craved for meat. Then they blamed God in chapter 14 after the spies came back from surveying Canaan that God wanted to kill them in the wilderness. But listen to what they said. They called Egypt “a land flowing with milk and honey!” They must have forgotten that they were flowing with sweat while forced to work by the slave-masters. In addition, just like Korah stated, these Reubenites accused Moses for ruling over them. They were not done yet. Continue in **verse 14**: “Moreover, you haven’t brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!” They grumbled that Moses had yet to lead them into Canaan and give them a share of the abundance and land. The expression of “gouge out the eyes” is an idiom that means misleading blind men. They thought they were cheated by Moses’ leadership. Have they forgotten about the 40 years of discipline? They are like angry stock-holders who accuse the CEO of a company that he has failed to deliver the results he promised. They are also like some frustrated public who accuse the politicians for not doing what they agreed to do when they asked people to vote for them. It is easy to put the blame on others. We think that people fail to live up to our demands. They did not do well enough to keep us happy. If you do not like something you bought, you can refund it. But it will be problematic if you take a consumer mentality to the church. God has no obligation to make you happy. He never calls your church leaders to be successful. He asks them to be faithful. When we are faithful, God will bless us. We should do our best in the areas God entrusts us. Let God be the examiner to give us score. Therefore, do not find fault in your church leaders. God puts them here to lead you. Before you criticize their work, ask yourself if you are humble enough to follow their leadership. Pray for them before you express your opinion. Spend some time to understand their struggles in the ministries. Do not hesitate to ask if you can help them in any way. In doing so, you are not an observer but a participant in the team work.

## 2. 挑戰的動機 Motivation

This company of 200 plus people accused Moses and Aaron. What were the motivations behind their scheme? We can look at **verse 10**: “He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too.” Korah was not satisfied with the role God gave him. He wanted to be a priest like Aaron. We see a similar jealousy in chapter 12. Miriam and Aaron were envious of Moses because God only spoke to him directly, but not to the two of them. Miriam was a prophetess and Aaron was a high priest. But they wanted to have what Moses had. Now Korah was jealous about Aaron. Korah did not want to be an assistant to the priests. When the Israelites were doing their census, God gave Moses some special instructions about the Levites in **Numbers 1:49-50** – 49 “You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. 50 Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony – over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it.” The census was to tally the number of males 20 and older. They would be the future soldiers to conquer Canaan. The Levites did not have to fight in wars. Instead, God assigned them to take care of the tabernacle. But this is not a tent you bring for camping. The tabernacle was a mobile temple for worship. Continue to read **verse 51**: “Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone

else who goes near it shall be put to death.” God did not allow anyone else other than the Levites to come close to the tabernacle, let alone to touch it! The Levites were also responsible to carry and set up other accessories like the lampstand, the altar and the Ark of the Covenant. God gave the Levites an honorable role to handle sacred matters. Later when the tabernacle was replaced by the temple, king David and his son Solomon appointed the Levites to specific duties like gatekeepers, musicians, choir members, etc. Talking about worship, in fact God gave Korah and his descendants musical talents. There are eleven psalms attributed to Korah. For example, we can look at **Psalm 46:1**. [For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to *alamoth*. A song.] God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. When we read the Psalms, we usually omit the heading. Actually, that line is part of the Scriptures. Despite the rebellion of Korah, God kept his name in the Bible. From all these evidences we can conclude that Korah was actually an important figure among the Israelites. Why did he complain about what he could not do, while failed to see what God put him to do? We have a lot of faithful coworkers serving in less conspicuous roles. Brother Thomas has been faithfully cooking for us for many years. He shared with me a few times that he was thankful that the Lord can use him. He never imagines that he can use his skills and experience to serve in the kitchen. Thomas is in his 80’s now. He still wants to serve 10 more years if God gives him good health. Thankfully, God provides brother Ouyang and sister Wang to be Thomas’ successors. Many of you also know that Jimmy has been mowing our church lawn and fixing things for a long time. If he sends us a bill, we have to pay him thousands of dollars. I told Jimmy and Jeannie that no one would blame them if they go fishing or golfing, or take care of their grandkids. But they choose to serve God because they love the Lord, His church and His people. What tasks does God call you to do in our church? It is natural for us to admire the gifts and talents other people have. You can ask God to give you those capabilities. But do not forget what you have and others don’t. You can grumble all day, or you can contribute what God gives you to serve joyfully. Do not make an excuse that there are other people serving already. Just like there is no dispensable organ in our body, there should be no surplus member in a church. God puts you in this family for a reason. Do not think that you are too old and you should give opportunities to the young people. Share your experience with them and coach them to become more effective coworkers.

### 3. 挑戰的解決 Resolution

Some Israelites leaders accused Moses and Aaron. Moses revealed the motivation behind their effort. Now we will see a resolution of their challenge. Listen to Moses’ response in **verse 5**: ... “In the morning the Lord will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him.” Moses let God come to his resolution. Notice that God was the subject in this verse: God would show whom He had chosen, He would make the person holy and He would allow that person to come before Him. Moses proposed a resolution in **verses 6-7**: 6 “You, Korah, and all your followers are to do this: Take censers 7 and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before the Lord. The man the Lord chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!” Moses used the same expression that the gang used to respond Korah: “You have gone too far!” They attempted to challenge God’s authority. The test was straightforward: the 250 people and Aaron would light a fire and put some incense into each person’s censer. God would reveal His approved servants. Aaron should have a vivid memory of the procedure. A few years ago, his two sons tried the same thing. The result was tragic. We can look at **Leviticus 10:1-2** - 1 Aaron’s sons Nadab and

Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. 2 So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Here the word “unauthorized” can mean “illegal.” Perhaps the two men did it for fun, or they just wanted to smell the sweet fragrance. Therefore, God struck them dead. There was a serious consequence if anyone broke God’s commands. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, we see a clear distinction between the holy and common objects. All the accessories in the sanctuary were made according to God’s specific instructions. Those items and the priests had to go through a purification process before a religious service. The priests had to bathe and wash their hands and feet. The accessories in the sanctuary and the priests had to be anointed with a special-made oil. It reflects God’s holiness. The sanctuary blocked people out rather than to invite people in. Without God’s permission, no one could come before Him. It is just like the President of U.S. Even his good friends have to make an appointment and go through a security check before they can go into the oval office. With that in mind, it was unthinkable for Korah to ask for the rank of priesthood. We shall see God’s judgment to Korah and his gang next time when we study the second half of the chapter. Moses let God to resolve the challenge for him. We see another example in the New Testament. Some members of the Corinth church challenged Paul’s qualification as an apostle. Paul responded in **1 Corinthians 4:3** – I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. Paul saw himself as a steward, not a boss. He strived to be faithful in what the Lord called him to do. He let God be his judge. Continue to read **verse 5**: ...wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. Paul knew that when he meets the Lord, he will be rewarded for his faithfulness. Therefore, Paul took people’s criticism lightly. When we serve in the church, we will receive different comments. Even when you open a table, someone may say that you put it at a wrong direction. When someone did nine out of ten things well, we fail to appreciate the good work. Instead, we find fault in the one thing that was not done perfectly. I have served in the church long enough to learn that. But I am always ready for your comments. Please let me know if there is anything I should improve. Do not talk to your buddies only, bring your suggestions to me directly. As an encouragement to our fellow coworkers, we should not live by approval rating. You are not the U.S. President. Do not feel flattered when people praise you. Give God all the glory, and be thankful for people’s support. But do not quit yet if others give you some negative feedback. Let God be your judge.

## CONCLUSION

We learn from the story today that we must obey God’s sovereignty before we will follow men’s leadership. Korah and his company sinned because they rebelled against God’s sovereignty. They fought for the authority God did not intend to give them. God never explained why He picked the Levites to serve in the sanctuary, or why only Aaron’s descendants had the privilege to serve as priests. It is God’s sovereignty to choose whoever He wants to assign. It is a blessing for us to be used by God too. In a faith community, God ordains a proper order that He sees fit. We have many ministry leaders in our church. They may not be the most educated or the smartest, or people who are the most knowledgeable about the Bible. But God puts them in leadership positions. We should give them our support, and to follow their guidance as long as they are leading us by Biblical principles. You never know. Perhaps one day God will call you to be a leader too. People will treat you as a role-model and look up to you for direction.