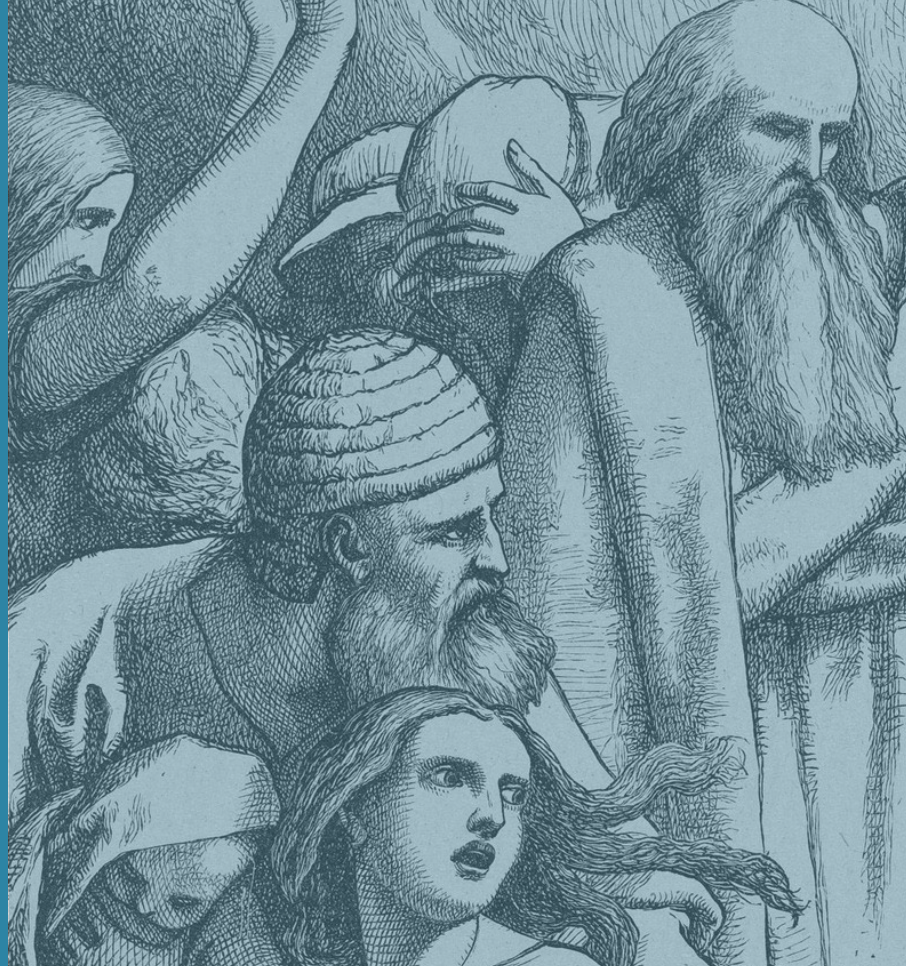


A Call to Sacrifice for the People of Israel

Parashat Korach



Parashat Korach

This Shabbat we learn about Parashat Korach (Korah). Who exactly was Korah? He was a prominent figure from the tribe of Levi; one of the leaders of the people of Israel. In addition, he challenged Moses regarding his leadership and Aaron's election to priesthood.

Our weekly Torah portion describes a very severe rebellion by Korah and 250 of his men, against Moses and Aaron. Korah and his men actually accused Moses and Aaron of appointing themselves to their positions:

"...And now you also want to lord it over us!" – Numbers 16:13b [NIV]

They also claimed that Moses and Aaron used their status for personal pleasure:

"...Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" – Numbers 16:3b [NIV]

Korah's argument was that all people were equal; we are all holy and we are all the same. This word, equality, is more relevant today than ever, today we are all fighting for equality.

Are We All Created Equal?

Our social life starts at kindergarten where everyone is considered equal. We all sing the same songs and play the same games. At my daughter's kindergarten, they had a sport's day. There were no winners, however, everyone received a medal, everyone gets first place.

Life moves on to first grade where we are crammed into a square classroom for 12 years, where our only common denominator is our date of birth. Our interests, our talents, and even our personalities are squeezed into a cookie-cutter pattern. The children wear the same uniform, there is no way to stand out. At some point, we became convinced that we were all equal.

As the Haggadah says, we all came out of Egypt. We crossed the sea together, together we stood facing Mount Sinai, we accepted the Torah together, we are all equally responsible for the Torah – but can we ignore the fact that Moses is the greatest prophet? The concluding verses of the Torah are:

“Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.” – Deuteronomy 34:10-12 [NIV]

(And then we say the words “chazak, chazak, v’nitchazek” to conclude the Torah.)

The Need for Inequality

Moses is the greatest of the prophets. But what about Yeshua? Yeshua is not only a prophet, He is much more than that. Yeshua is the embodiment of salvation, he is the Messiah. He is the subject of all the prophecies of Moses, and all other prophets. All the prophets prophesied about Yeshua.

Returning to Moses, can we or should we sacrifice the uniqueness of Moses, or of any one of us, on the altar of equality?

Within the family, you can find everything except for equality. Inequality between parents and children, between the first born and the last born, between the genders and various ages. Everyone has a unique place, role, and rights.

We wouldn't have made it anywhere if we were all created equal. This is because we all need each other, because we have differences in talents and abilities. The architect needs an engineer, who needs a contractor, who needs an electrician and a plumber, who needs a builder, who needs a carpenter, and everyone needs a customer.

A Good Leader Knows How to Utilize Talent

A good leader knows how to derive from each person a different skill. He also knows how to place each person in the optimal position for that particular individual's talent and ability. When a person is in the right environment, which allows a person to express his talents, this is called success and everyone benefits.

Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft and one of the richest and most influential people in the world, explains 11 important and practical points for life. One of these points is that human beings are not equal. No matter how much the world tries to make us think we are equal, men, women, or otherwise, this is simply not true.

God has entrusted us all with different gifts, and in varying quantities. I like to call these gifts "talents" or "abilities." Each of us has a different ability that also comes in different quantity.

God has Given Us a Varying Amount of Talents

We have all received a different amount of talents from above. One might have received twenty, another received ten, five, or even three.

In the parable of the talents, which appears in Matthew 25:14, A rich man went on a journey and deposited his fortune with his three servants. Each of

them received a different amount and the freedom to do with the portion he received as best he could. When he returned, he discovered that two of his servants were responsible and loyal.

They actively invested the capital, they tried to the best of their ability to generate profit with what was given to them. What are those profits? The parable teaches us that in every man the profit is different, but the principle is similar, and it is to build each other and the Kingdom of Heaven. These servants thought to themselves: “I know what is required of me and I want to achieve these goals.”

But the third servant chose the passive route. He said to his employer:

“...I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground...” – Matthew 25:24b,25a [NIV]

He’s saying, “I didn’t do anything with it. I’m returning the deposit.”

The third servant can be seen as a servant who has not utilized his talent and his ability. He buried it in the ground and returned it to his master.

Why We Should Use Our Talents for Good

We too, will have to account for the way in which we have used everything entrusted to us.

If we are found to be unfaithful, even what we have will be taken from us and given to others, to those who are faithful, just like what happened to Korah. Once again, Korah was not just a common man, he was of a high standing, but once he stopped being loyal, he tried to exploit his status and wealth for harm, for rebellion, and in the end he lost what he had.

The hard part of the parable is undoubtedly the claim of the lazy slave, the one who did not do enough with what God gave him, “I knew that you are a hard man.” There are several ways to understand this part, I will try to interpret it this way:

For some reason we think that worshiping God, believing in God, and serving Him, gives us special rights as believers. Somehow we will have it

better, more comfortable, and that we will have special protection.

Sometimes this really happens, but most often it does not. Occasionally it's the other way around, we actually suffer more because of our love and worship of God, because of our service.

Bad Things Can Still Happen to God's Servants

Let's start from this basic fact: God created us and we are His. He can do as He pleases. The fact that we serve Him is because we must. Not because there is a reward, but because it is our duty. If we do not fulfill this duty, we will be thrown into the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, into darkness. The fact that God sometimes grants the faithful a reward is a bonus.

Sometimes we have the idea in mind, deeply rooted both in Judaism and in Christianity, that God's servants are not harmed.

During my military service in the Second Lebanon War in 2006, one of the greatest rabbis of Northern Israel hosted our unit and cared for us until we went into Lebanon.

But what is interesting is that he gave everyone a half-shekel coin, which we were obligated to give to charity after we return from the war.

What did he mean by this? That we are servants of God being sent out, and therefore no evil will come to us, that God's servants are not harmed. This is a nice idea, but it's not Biblical nor is it realistic.

It's the same with our way of thinking. We think that we can manipulate God. If I give up \$200 of my salary, I will lack nothing. God will take care of my expenses. Really?

The Bible is full of bad things that happened to good people, prophets, priests, and leaders.

One of the great prophets, Elijah, who ascended into heaven, is the same prophet who suffered greatly here on this earth. Half of the time he was running away from King Ahab, who wanted to kill him. If you think he had fun running away, he definitely didn't! Elijah begged God, who was not good to him, to kill him out of mercy (1 Kings 19:4).

Why am I telling you this? There is a verse in our parasha, which is significantly underappreciated. We truly do not understand the depth of sacrifice that is embodied in this verse:

“So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped.” – Numbers 16:47,48 [NIV]

The Importance of Self-Sacrifice

We read this verse in passing, but the same Aaron, whose two sons died, punished with fire from above, ran into the inferno, into the punishment of God. He ran and stood between the living and the dead.

If for a moment we think that Aaron was exempt, and that he would not be hurt, we are incorrect. Aaron took an unusual risk. Most people would escape from the fire and flee when bad things happen, terror attacks and the like. The norm is that people do not run into danger.

However, here we see the essence of the heavy price of leadership, which puts the people before the leader, who loves the people – even if they sinned, and the leader is willing to endanger himself for the sake of the community.

There is something to learn from this act. We are a part of this people, it is our duty to sacrifice, even if we might get hurt.

We are required to sacrifice in army service. We are required to sacrifice a great deal as parents and as believers in the community.

Here I want to conclude with a story from the Gemara, a dilemma about a jug of water:

“If two people were walking on a desolate path and there was a jug [kiton] of water in the possession of one of them, and the situation was such that if both drink from the jug, both will die, as there is not enough water, but if only one of them drinks, he will reach a settled area, there is a dispute as to the halakha.

Ben Petora taught: It is preferable that both of them drink and die, and let neither one of them see the death of the other. This was the accepted opinion until Rabbi Akiva came and taught that the verse states: 'And your brother shall live with you,' indicating that your life takes precedence over the life of the other." – Bava Metzia 62a

There have been many commentaries on this story. In other words, why does Ben Petora claim one thing, and why does Rabbi Akiva say another?

There is a third alternative, which was not discussed: it is possible that the owner of the jug will be permitted, or even asked, to hand over the entire jug to his friend and die.

The third interpretation is the idea of self-sacrifice, we as Messianic Jews can and must add to the Israeli-Jewish discourse. The Apostle Paul explains to us the idea of self-sacrifice:

"I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises." – Romans 9:1-4 [NIV]

God forbid we were to take this verse at face value. I see the spirit of sacrifice of the Apostle Paul, like Aaron's, who ran into the fire, and with his body and his courage, stopped the plague.

A day will come when we, as believers, will be called to the flag and there will be those who run into the inferno in self-sacrifice for the sake of the (physical) people of Israel. We can only do so with the help of Yeshua the Messiah who lives in us.

The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context*

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