



"Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man."

—C.S. Lewis

24-Aug-12

A Warning from Jude (Part Three)

In Parts One and Two, we covered the first two corrupt men, Cain and Balaam, that the apostle Jude uses as examples of the kinds of ungodly leadership that had "crept in" to the church ([Jude 4](#), 11). The final character in this evil triumvirate is Korah. Jude relates that those he is warning against "have . . . perished in the rebellion of Korah." The crux of Korah's story appears in the opening verses of Numbers 16:

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before [Moses](#) with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" ([Numbers 16:1-3](#))

Korah and his ilk make common cause with their fellowman as a means to achieve their own ends. Theirs was a message of equality and populism, but all they were really concerned about was their own positions.

What they said contained a measure of truth: The whole congregation was technically holy (meaning it had been set apart), and yes, the Lord was among them. However, what these men had overlooked is that *God puts people where He wants them*. In verses 8-10, Moses points out the honor and privilege that God had already given to these men, but this was not enough for them. They wanted to climb further up the ladder. In verses 11 and 30, Moses says that their agitating for change in the God-given order of things was in reality an assault against God and a rejection of Him. They did not trust the way that God had ordered His congregation, believing that they could do a better job! In the end, they all died terrifying deaths because of their rebellion against their Sovereign.

Sadly, even after their swift judgment, the seeds of rebellion that they had planted continued to grow. The next day, the whole congregation—the one that was "holy" and had "the LORD among them"—complained against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of killing "the people of the LORD." In response, God sent a plague, and when it was all over, an additional 14,700 people had died! Not only that, a great many more would have died if it had not been for the intercession of Moses and Aaron. Verse 45 suggests that God was ready to consume every single Israelite except for Moses and Aaron.

This example is especially relevant within the church of God today, as we see leaders and would-be leaders jockeying for position and influence. We see titles like "apostle" and "prophet" being taken on, but it is not obvious that it is God who has installed them in those offices. We see men agitating to be out front, not content to serve from behind. The apostle Paul spends a significant amount of space explaining that those who are in the Body have been placed where God wants them ([I Corinthians 12:18](#)), just as God placed Moses, Aaron, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in their respective positions. God considers it rebellion to push against His ordering of things, warning in [Proverbs 24:21](#) not to associate with those trying to bring about such a change. The verb tense in [Jude 11](#) concerning Korah indicates that their fate is already sealed: They are doomed to perish.

In examining the records of Cain, Balaam, and Korah, we could name several commonalities, but one in particular stands out. All three of these men were intensely self-willed. They all understood what God wanted from them, yet they consciously chose to follow their own wills instead. Jude's whole epistle shows that all of his descriptions of those troubling the church would fit under the banner of "self-will." These men are noted for exercising *their* will to achieve their own ends without any real concern about *God's* will.

By way of contrast, consider the outcome if [Jesus Christ](#) had used their approach when He came to decision points in His life. Imagine if, when the time came for Him to be the [sin offering](#) for all of mankind, He decided that He wanted to fulfill only the grain offering—maybe, like Cain, He just wanted to be devoted to His fellow man instead of making a blood sacrifice. Perhaps He could have healed every person in Jerusalem—or even all Judea—given lasting encouragement, and even bestowed a lot of money on the poor. Those could all be good works, yet that self-willed choice would have been evil in its effects because it would have thwarted the benevolent purpose that God had established at the foundation of [the world](#).

Suppose Christ's head had been turned by Satan's offer of all the kingdoms of the world, which would have included all of the temporal rewards or profits that He could dream of. What if, like Balaam, He had been motivated by immediate gain for Himself, rather than the long-term benefit of all mankind? Thankfully, He persevered and rejected the bribe that would have cursed us all forever.

Imagine if, like Korah, Jesus had been more concerned about His position and less concerned about His service. What if He had decided that being equal with God *was* something "to be grasped at" and that His proper place was at the top, instead of taking on the form of a bondservant ([Philippians 2: 6-7](#))? We would have no [hope](#)!

However, Jesus Christ was *not* self-willed. At every turn, He submitted to the Father, knowing that circumstances would work out for the best. Our salvation and every uncountable blessing we receive along the way are results of His saying to our Father, "Not as I will, but as You will." For us to

be sons and daughters of the Most High God as well, we must likewise practice saying to Him, "Not as *I* will, but as *You* will."

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Five Major Problems in the Wilderness](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The Days of Unleavened Bread depict a period of intense judgment on the church. As God's called-out ones, we are sojourners and pilgrims on this earth, with our citizenship in heaven. Our pilgrimage to our Promised Land (the Kingdom of God), like our ancient forbears', may not go in a direct straight line, but in many circuitous routes. We are obligated to trust God in spite of all these apparent detours, following His lead, traversing through a spiritual wilderness with no familiar signposts. We walk by faith, not by sight, to the beat of a different drummer, requiring an intense reserve of faith. We could use the book of Numbers and the summary in I Corinthians 10 as a kind of roadmap, pointing out particular pitfalls. As God kept our forbears perpetually on edge, He does the same thing with us, continually leading us and correcting us, promoting our growth in order to save us. We have to be on guard against lusting, distorting the truth, infidelity, cowardice or fearfulness, peer pressure, presumptuous rebellion, rejecting God by rejecting God's representatives, grumbling, murmuring, complaining, and acting impulsively or rashly. Most of the people making the covenant in the wilderness church did not reach the Promised Land.

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by Mark Schindler

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