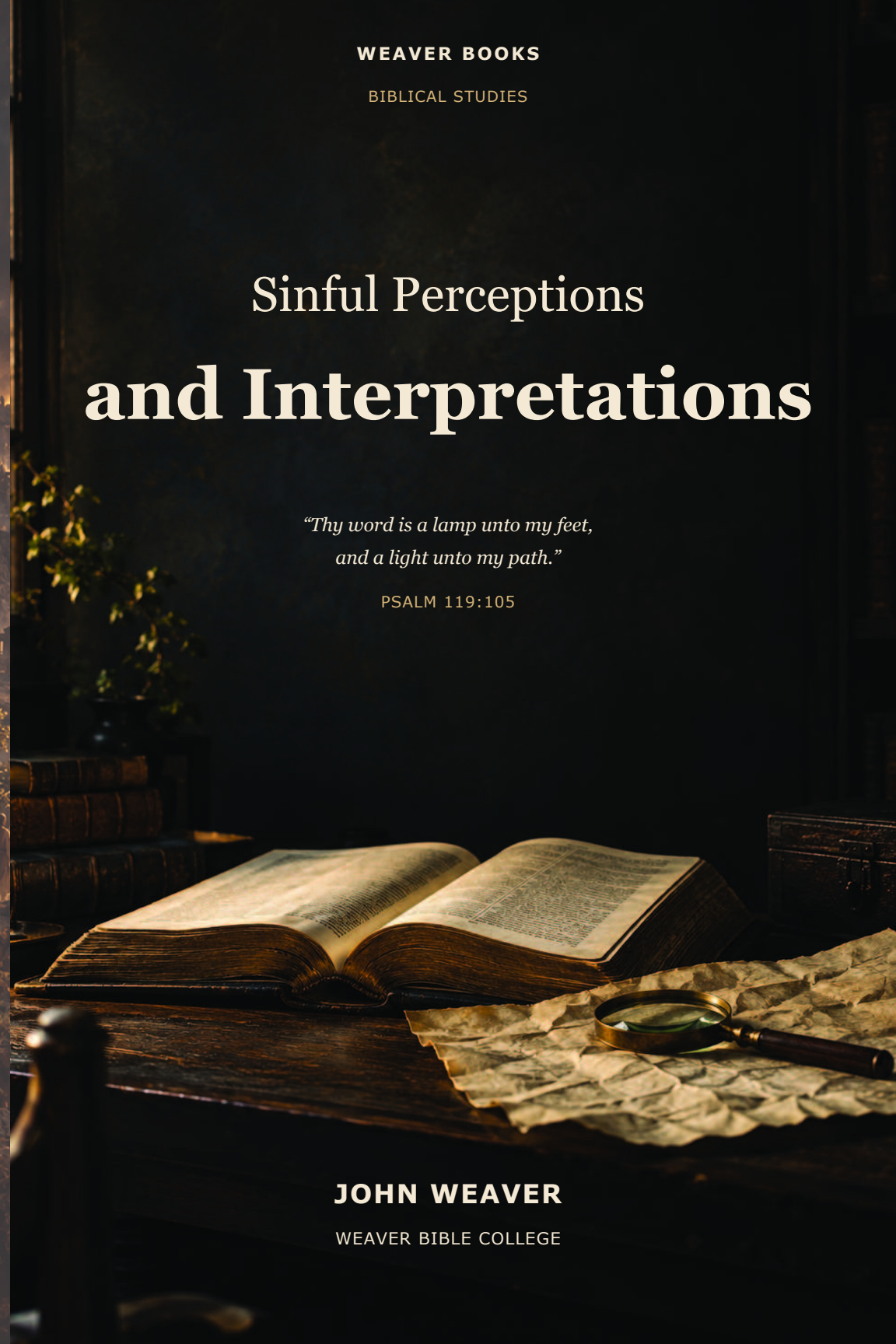
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BIBLICAL STUDIES

Sinful Perceptions and Interpretations

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

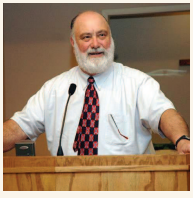
He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

PROVERBS 18:13

The way we perceive and interpret a situation can itself be shaped by sin. John Weaver considers assumptions, motives, judgment, and the authority of Scripture in correcting our understanding. These messages invite readers to test their conclusions honestly rather than treating a familiar interpretation as proof of its truth.

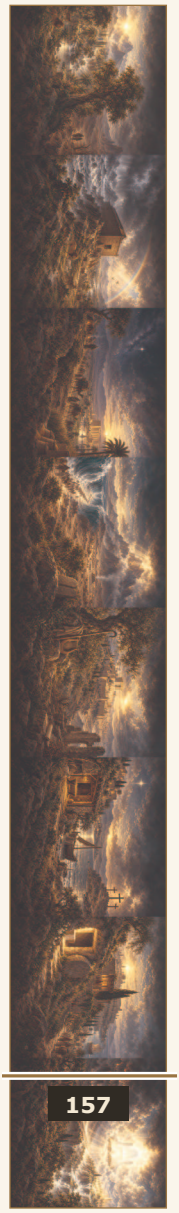
"The truth is that you and I perceive and interpret, but when we do so, we always do it from our own perspective."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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Sinful Perceptions and Interpretations

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CHAPTER 1

Sinful Perceptions and Interpretations

Part One of Two

SCRIPTURE READING - Numbers 16:1-15 (KJV)

If you will turn in your Bibles to the book of Numbers chapter 16, I want to read the first 15 verses. Now, Lord willing, next week I will finish this chapter, but I want to lay the foundation today. I am not talking about interpretation of the scripture. You will understand in just a moment. So Numbers chapter 16 beginning with verse 1.

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab and On, the sons of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. And they rose up before Moses with certain of the children of Israel, 250 princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said unto them, You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Wherefore, then, lift you up yourselves above the

> congregation of the Lord.' And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face. And he spake unto Korah and all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the Lord will show who are his and who is holy, and will cause him to come near unto him, even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. Take you censers, Korah, and all his company. Put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow.
>
> And it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy. You take too much upon you, you sons of Levi. And Moses said unto Korah, Here I pray you, you sons of Levi. Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren, the sons of Levi, with thee, and seek ye the priesthood also. For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord.

Sinful Perceptions and Interpretations

“And what is Aaron that you murmur against him?” Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, who said, “We will not come up. Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of the land that floweth with milk and honey to kill us in this wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up.” Moses was very wroth and said unto the Lord, “Respect not their offering. I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.”

All of us have used expressions such as, “I perceive,” “according to my interpretation,” or “according to my understanding.” Each one of us has used those expressions dozens of times. But has it ever occurred to you that your perception or interpretation could be absolutely sinful and wicked? Is it possible to have sinful perceptions and sinful interpretations?

Introduction: The Reality of Sinful Perceptions

Of course, you know the answer is yes. So how in the world do we get these sinful perceptions and interpretations? Every day, every hour, practically every minute, you and I are perceiving and interpreting things. Certainly, it is not wrong to perceive and interpret, as long as we perceive and interpret accurately and biblically.

You remember what our Lord said in John chapter 7, verse 24: "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Not everything is as it seems. God says, do not merely look upon the appearance; learn to judge righteous judgment.

The truth is that you and I perceive and interpret, but when we do so, we always do it from our own perspective. When we observe or see facts, we place our own perspective and interpretation upon them. Listen carefully: reality is not determined by man. Reality is determined by God. Everyone interprets and perceives according to his own worldview, his own particular and peculiar slant. One-worlders, as well as the unsaved, always view things in a totally and completely different light than does the child of God. If I were to ask you about our economy, you as a Christian would say, "Brother Weaver, the economy is in shambles."

It is contrary to God's Word. God demands silver and gold; He does. Money in the Bible is by weight. You can say, "This is a corrupt, thieving system, and the curse of God is upon it." That would be your perception, and you would be right in that perception. But if you asked a humanist or one of the one-worlders, they would say, "No, no, everything is just right in the economy. We have to have this debt system, and we have to control and manipulate it," because they would lose control over everyone and everything if they did not do it that way.

The point I am trying to make is that everyone sees and interprets things totally and completely differently. It depends on whether you are looking through the spectacles of Scripture or simply acting humanistically.

Since there are indeed sinful perceptions and sinful interpretations of facts, I want you to understand that it is possible to condemn an innocent individual. The truth is that we always place

our own slant and viewpoint upon whatever facts we observe. That is why the Bible says in Proverbs 21:2, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.”

Biblical Warnings About Self-Righteous Perceptions

If I asked you today for ideas about how best to take care of a certain situation, do you realize that each one of us who gave a possible solution would like our idea better than everyone else’s? Not only do we often believe that our interpretations and perceptions are right; we also believe that ours is the only just or right one. The Bible says in Proverbs 16:2, “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.” Listen to that: all the ways of man are clean in his own eyes. Moreover, Proverbs 18 and verse 7 tells us, “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.”

He that is first in his own cause seemeth to be just. When we observe and hear, we place our perception and interpretation upon the facts, and we do so from our viewpoint. When we think that what we perceive and interpret is always right, God says that we are acting foolishly. The Bible says in Proverbs 12 and verse 15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”

A fool in the Bible is not a mentally deficient person. A fool is someone who will not listen, hearken, or receive counsel. The reason he will not listen or receive counsel is that his mind is already made up. He thinks he is right. The problem becomes compounded when he acts upon what he thinks or perceives to be right when it is contrary to Scripture. That is why the Bible says in Psalm 36 and verse 2 that such a man flatters himself in his own eyes until his iniquity becomes hateful.

From Numbers chapter 16, I want to give you a clear illustration of this. We perceive and interpret, and we must understand that our perceptions and interpretations are not necessarily always right. The more rebellious, disobedient, and sinful we are, the worse our thinking, perception, and interpretations become.

It is our wicked hearts that enable us to think wickedly, perceive wickedly, and interpret wickedly. You remember the Bible says in Proverbs 23 and verse 7, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” We think evil, perceive evil, and interpret evil because we are evil. The more rebellious we are, the more evil we are, and the more unbiblical and ungodly our perception and interpretation will be.

Indisputable Facts

Indisputable Facts About Moses and Aaron

Before beginning Numbers chapter 16, let us consider some indisputable facts. They are indisputable because they are very plainly taught in the Word of God, and everyone in Numbers chapter 16 would already have known them.

The first indisputable fact is that God called Moses to be a prophet, priest, and king. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses said, “The Lord thy God will raise thee up a prophet from the midst of thee of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” Moses was a prophet. Moreover, he said that God would raise up another prophet like him, and that prophet, according to the Scriptures, was none other than Jesus Christ. Thus, we know that Moses was a prophet; the Bible says so.

Was Moses also a priest? The answer is yes. You must remember that Moses was the son of Amram, of the tribe of Levi, just as Aaron his brother was. It was Moses who consecrated Aaron and his sons to be priests. It was Moses who offered sacrifices for them until they were consecrated, and it was Moses who consecrated all the instruments of the tabernacle. Certainly, Moses was not only a prophet; he was also a priest. He did the work of a priest until Aaron and his sons were consecrated and set up.

Was Moses a king? The answer is yes. The Bible declares him to be a king. In Deuteronomy 33:5, concerning Moses, the Bible says, “And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.” He was king. So what did God do? God called Moses to be prophet, priest, and king.

Secondly, God also directed that Aaron and his sons be consecrated as priests. That is a second indisputable fact. Exodus 29:44 says, “And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar I will also sanctify: both Aaron and his sons, to minister unto me in the priest’s office.” God said He was choosing Aaron and his sons to be His priests. In Exodus 30:30, God told Moses, “And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest’s office.” Nobody is going to argue with that. God chose Aaron and his sons to be priests.

Here are three indisputable facts. First, God called Moses to be a prophet, priest, and king. Everyone knew that. Secondly, God consecrated Aaron and his sons to be priests. No one is going to argue with that. Thirdly, God called Moses and Aaron to deliver the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. In fact, God said in Exodus 3:10, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Now you know the story; I do not have to go through it. God judged the land of Egypt, destroyed Pharaoh, and destroyed the land of Egypt and many people in it. Moreover, when God sent Moses and Aaron to Egypt, He specifically said that, unto Pharaoh, Moses was going to be like a god, and Aaron was to be his prophet, or his mouthpiece. You will find that in Exodus 7:1: “And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.”

God called Moses to be a prophet, priest, and king; God consecrated Aaron and his sons to be priests; and God used Moses and Aaron to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt. It was Moses who brought them out. You will remember that the pillar of cloud led them by day and the pillar of fire by night. Moses went up into the mount and spoke with God. He brought back the law of God, and his face shone so greatly that they had to put a veil over it so the people would not see it shining. Everyone knew these facts. Moses and Aaron were leading the children of Israel in the wilderness. These are indisputable facts.

The Rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram

However, when you get to Numbers chapter 16, Dathan, Abiram, and Korah are not challenging these facts. They are placing their own perception and their own interpretation upon these facts. This is very important. Ten people can look at the same thing and come away with ten different perceptions and ten different interpretations. Why? Because we always perceive and interpret based upon our viewpoint, whatever viewpoint we are looking from. Perceptions and interpretations differ many times from the facts.

It is important for you to grasp and comprehend that interpretations and perceptions can be so completely false and erroneous that they will cause innumerous problems, even rebellion and death. In Numbers chapter 16, that is exactly what false perceptions and false interpretations cause: rebellion and death. Now, if you look in verse 1, the Bible says, "Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi."

Let me stop right there. Korah was a Levite; that is, he was of the Levitical tribe. He was called as a Levite to minister to Aaron. There are two other men mentioned here, Dathan and Abiram. They are called the sons of Eliab and On, the son of Peleth, the son of Reuben. Dathan and Abiram were not Levites. They were Reubenites, of the tribe of Reuben. Thus, we have a Levite, Korah, and two Reubenites who were leaders in this conspiracy, and they had many followers.

They joined together to challenge Moses and Aaron. Before going further, remember what Scripture says concerning Moses. Turn back in your Bibles to Numbers chapter 12 and verse 3. This was an indisputable fact as well, because God plainly says so: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which are upon the face of the earth." God says that Moses was the meekest man on earth. Moses was not a power-mad, proud, arrogant, and haughty psychopath. Moses was meek, gentle, and honorable.

Yet, regardless of all these facts, Dathan, Abiram, Korah, and all these other people joined together against Moses and Aaron. Look in verse 3: "And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said unto them, You take too much upon you."

"Seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them, wherefore then lift you up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord." So Moses and Aaron were charged with pride, insolence, and usurpation. The attitude of Dathan, Abiram, and Korah was simply this: Who do you think you are? All of Israel is holy. Anyone can be a priest who wants to be a priest. Anyone can be a leader who wants to be a leader. We can do whatever we choose. We are all holy. Moses and Aaron, you have no right to tell us what to do. We can do whatever we please.

Their attitude was this: Just because God has used you in times past does not mean that you may rule over us now. We can get rid of you whenever we please.

See how Dathan, Abiram, and Korah were building things up in their minds. Here is the sinful interpretation and sinful perception. The Bible says, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." That means we are to settle problems before the sun goes down. Ron could say something to me, and it might not sit well with me. I could say to myself, "I wonder how he meant that. I bet that dirty dog was taking a slam at me." Was he taking a slam? How would I know unless I ask him?

I have interpreted. I have placed my perception and interpretation upon something he said. If I do not like him, or if I am already mad at him, I am going to think the worst of him. I will build it up in my mind until I cannot even speak to him. I do not want to see him or be around him. Why? Because of my perception and interpretation.

These men, Dathan, Abiram, and Korah, were using their perceptions and interpretation to justify their sin and rebellion. You will find that rebellious men always have to justify their rebellion. Wicked men will always interpret wickedly, and the more wicked they are, the more wicked their perceptions and interpretation of the facts. I find it interesting that it was the Reubenites who joined with Korah. You would have to ask yourself this question.

Why in the world would the Reubenites join with the Korathites? Why would they join with Korah, who was a Levite? Who was Jacob's firstborn? Reuben. The firstborn was to receive the double portion, but Reuben did not get it. Joseph did. His two sons,

Ephraim and Manasseh, received the double portion in the land of Israel.

Why did Reuben not get the firstborn's portion? The answer is that, in Genesis 35 and verse 22, he was disinherited by his father because he committed adultery with his father's concubine. Jacob said, “Oh no, you're not going to get the firstborn's portion.” It went to Joseph, and Ephraim and Manasseh got it. I could not prove this, but maybe the Reubenites were thinking, “If we join with Korah and help him, we might can get our firstborn's portion back.”

But I do know this: Korah was definitely using them to bolster his aim for the priesthood. Wicked men are not interested in helping others; they are interested in using others. Korah's object was not necessarily to abolish the distinction between the Levites and the people. His object in all of this was to win the priesthood for himself.

Look in Numbers 16 and verse 10. Moses said, “And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren, the sons of Levi, with thee also, and seek ye the priesthood also.” Notice those words: “and seek ye the priesthood also.” Korah's ultimate design was to use the Reubenites and anyone else he could use so that he could get to the priesthood for himself.

Look at his argument in Numbers 16, verse 3: “And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Wherefore then lift you up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord.” All of God's people are holy, and since we are all holy, anyone may be a priest, even Reubenites. We are all the people of the Lord.

The same argument is used today for women preachers: “All of God's people are holy. Women can preach as well as a man.” Not according to Scripture. One of the first qualifications of the pastor is that he must be the husband of one wife. I have never yet found a woman who could be the husband of one wife.

Men and women are equal in their standing before God. That is true. But we are not equal positionally. God has assigned different positions to men, women, and children. Read 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Here is the argument Korah is using: all of God's people are holy.

That means we can do whatever we want to do and be whatever we want to be. That is not true. It may be true that all of God's people are holy, but God calls some to specific tasks and responsibilities to which He does not call others.

The Bible tells us in Exodus chapter 23 and verse 3, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.” I do not know how big this rebellion was, but it was pretty big. Not only did you have Dathan, Abiram, and Korah, but you had 250 other princes who followed them, probably many more as well. So it is true that we are not to follow a multitude to do evil; but, friend, we are not even to follow an individual to do evil.

John Calvin said concerning this verse, “I am rather of the opinion that they would thus make a charge of presumptuous and sacrilegious supremacy, as if Moses and Aaron had not only usurped more than their right, but had also robbed God of his supreme authority.” They therefore reproached the holy men with having impiously subjected to themselves the inheritance of God.

I have heard people say that very blasphemously: “Well, who died and made you God?” That was exactly the attitude these people were taking against Moses and Aaron.

John Gill, concerning verse 3, said, “And you take too much upon you,” the one to be king, the other to be priest; for they imagined that Moses took the civil government into his hands, and Aaron the priesthood, of themselves, without any call of God to either, which, of course, is contrary to the facts. The Israelites of the other tribes, beside Levi and Reuben, thought Moses took too much upon himself by taking the Levites instead of the firstborn and conferring a dignity on his own brethren, the sons of Kohath, who were near akin to him, and on all the sons of Levi. The Levites conspired against him because they were given to Aaron and his sons. Dathan and Abiram entered into a conspiracy because he had removed the birthright from Reuben, their father, and given it to Joseph.

For it is probable that they suspected him because of Joshua's ministry, that Korah was angry with Moses because Moses had conferred the government of the Kohathites on Elizaphan, the son of Uzziel, the youngest son of Kohath, when he himself, Korah, was the

eldest son of the elder son of Kohath. In other words, Korah was not chosen as a leader either, but his younger brother received the headship. So they said to Moses, “All right, Moses, you are taking too much upon yourself. You cannot do this.”

Moses' Response: Humility and Appeal to God

When they confronted Moses and charged him with taking too much upon himself and assuming the headship and leadership of the people, look what happened to him. “When Moses heard it, he fell upon his face.” Note Moses’ first response to this wicked and malicious charge: he fell upon his face. That is, he humbled himself before God.

His second response was to declare that God would choose who would stand before Him. “And he spake unto Korah and to all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the Lord will show who are his, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near unto him, even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.” Here is what Moses was saying: “Boys, I may not be the one that God calls, and I may not be the one that God uses. But the decision is going to be God’s and not yours. If God doesn’t want to use me anymore, that is quite all right. But God will choose who will stand before Him.”

In verses 5 through 7, Moses instructed Dathan, Abiram, and Korah what to do. He said, “This do; take you censers, Korah, and all his company, and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow. And it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy.” Then notice what Moses said to Korah: “You take too much upon you, you sons of Levi.”

If you go back to verse 3, what did Korah charge Moses with? “And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, You take too much upon you.” The very charge they leveled against Moses was now brought back to their feet. The very indictment they made against Moses, Moses now brought against them: “You take too much upon you, you sons of Levi.”

It was not enough that the Levitical tribe had been given to Aaron and his sons to minister around the tabernacle, nor that Levi had

charge of the tabernacle and its instruments. It was not enough that they had charge of protecting Aaron and his sons, or that God had chosen them rather than the firstborn of all Israelites. It was not enough that God had called the children of Levi to be the ministers of God. No, no, no, no.

The Real Bone of Contention

They wanted the priesthood also. Their perceptions of leadership, rulership, ministry and service, and holiness were completely wicked and vile. Their attitude demonstrated that they were not worthy to serve God even in the lowliest service, much less a higher one. When you cannot be satisfied with what God has called you to do, something is vitally wrong.

Fourth, Moses places his finger upon the real bone of contention. Look in verse 11: "For which cause both thou and all this company are gathered together against the Lord? And what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?" Their wicked perceptions and interpretations were really against God. You do not understand that your bone of contention is with God. Moses and Aaron were nothing; they were nobodies. The people were not fighting against Moses and Aaron; they were fighting against the Lord. When we murmur, complain, and bellyache against God's providence, we are rebelling against God.

Look what happened to Israel every time they murmured and complained. God usually had to kill a few thousand of them before they realized that their murmuring and complaining was against God. Whenever God's men are specifically attacked and God's people are generally attacked, the issue is really not against God's preachers and God's people. The issue is against God. Why are God's preachers and people attacked? Because we are visible targets.

Who can get to God? If you are a wicked man, would you rather attack a stronger person or a weaker person? I know the answer: the weaker person. And who is the weakest? We, the children of God, are far weaker. God understood this.

For in Deuteronomy 32:10, the Bible says concerning His people, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness;

he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye," which is the pupil, the most tender part of the eye. And in Zechariah 2:8, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." Whenever God's preachers and God's people are attacked, it is an attack upon God Himself.

If you want to make me angry quickly, you mess with my family. You try to hurt my wife, children, or grandchildren, and you will see one angry man. But I have news for you: the same principle applies to God. You mess with His children, and you will find that God indeed has a righteous anger.

Now I want to show you the heart of Moses. I want you to see that he was indeed the meekest man on earth. Look in verse 12, because here is the heart of Moses. Moses had already spoken to the Levites, as we have just read down to verse 11. "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, they were the Reubenites now. Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, who said, we will not come up."

I want you to know what Moses was willing to do. Although Dathan and Abiram had rebelled against him, challenged him, threatened him, maligned and ridiculed him, Moses was still willing to try to work things out. He sent and called for them. Evidently, while he was addressing the Levites, he said, "And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren, the sons of Levi, with thee, seek ye the priesthood also, for which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you murmur against him?" He was addressing the Levites.

But where in the world were Dathan and Abiram and the Reubenites at that time? They had walked away. They would not listen to Moses or hear one thing he said; they went back to their tents. So Moses sent to call them and said, "Come on up; let us try to work this thing out." Their answer was, "We will not come up." Their attitude was, "Who do you think you are? We are not going to obey you. We do not acknowledge your authority or leadership. We are not going to come up and talk to you."

Wicked Interpretations of the Rebels

I want you to grasp how wicked, warped, twisted, and perverted their perception of the facts really was. To me, this is unbelievable. But look in verse 13. These are Abiram and Dathan, the Reubenites. They said, "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of the land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in this wilderness? except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us."

Here, Dathan and Abiram refer to Egypt as a land that flowed with milk and honey. It seems to me, if I recall correctly, that in Egypt they were slaves, suffering, starving, crying, and begging God for deliverance. Now, all of a sudden, Egypt turns into a wonderful experience and a beautiful vacation spot: "You brought us up out of the land that flowed with milk and honey." Was Egypt a land that flowed with milk and honey, especially for the Israelites? No! But now they are interpreting it that way; they are perceiving it that way.

Second, look in verse 13. The reason they left Egypt was the fault of Moses. It was all his fault: "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of the land that floweth with milk and honey?" It was Moses who brought them up out of the land. It is all his fault—he forced two to three million people to leave Egypt. Did Israel leave Egypt? Yes. Did Moses lead them? Yes. Was Egypt a land flowing with milk and honey? No. How can you place such wicked, false perceptions and interpretations upon facts?

There is a difference between facts and your interpretation of facts, and between facts and your perception of facts. They are saying, "Moses, we had it made in Egypt until you forced us out of the land." Thirdly, in verse 13, they charge Moses with attempted murder: "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of the land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness?" Moses, the only reason you brought us out was so that you might kill us. You are a murderer; you are trying to murder us. Remember how God preserved them in the wilderness, provided for them, and met every need they had. Yet now they charge Moses with attempted murder.

Fourthly, here is the crux of the whole matter. They say, "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of the land that floweth

with milk and honey, to kill us in this wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?" They perceive that Moses is usurping and arrogating authority to himself. He is making himself a king and a prince over them.

Notice how everything else is interpreted and perceived in reference to their view of Moses. Since Moses, according to them, is wicked, vile, and wrong, everything he did was only to elevate himself. He had no regard for the children of Israel and no respect for anyone; he did it only to elevate himself. Once you have a wicked mind, you begin to interpret and perceive things in light of your own viewpoint. You interpret and perceive every fact in light of your preconceived ideas.

So, fourthly, they say Moses did only what he did so that he could elevate himself. Read the Bible. Do you know how many times God was going to kill all of them and make a better nation out of Moses? Moses intervened for them and said, "Please don't kill them." You remember that? It really sounds as though Moses was elevating himself, doesn't it?

But fifthly, look in verse 14. You are seeing a wicked interpretation. "Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance or fields or vineyards, wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up." They try to demonstrate that they are correct in their wicked perceptions and interpretations because Moses has not delivered what he promised. By the way, it was God who promised, not Moses. But now that is Moses' fault too.

The delay in entering a land flowing with milk and honey and receiving an inheritance could not possibly have been their fault, or have resulted from their sin or rebellion. No, it was all Moses' fault. He was the wicked one because Moses wanted to be king. Sixthly, in verse 14, they accuse Moses of extreme cruelty, claiming that he did this only to establish himself: "Wilt thou put out the eyes of these men?"

What men are they talking about? Remember that twelve spies went to search out the land. Ten brought back an evil report; only two, Joshua and Caleb, brought back a correct report. Dathan,

Abiram, and Korah were saying, in effect, “We have ten to two. This is a foul land, a wicked land, a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof. There is no food there; moreover, the giants are in the land.” And they said to Moses, “Wilt thou put out the eyes of these men?” Will you dig out the eyes of these men who are in opposition to you?

They know what they saw. Will you dig out their eyes just so that you can elevate yourself and establish your government? Here is what they are saying to Moses: “We will not come up. We’re not going to be blinded by your shenanigans. We know who you are. We know what you’re doing.” Matthew Poole said on this verse, “…of these men, wilt thou put out the eyes of these men, that is, those who were confederate with us, and all the people who are of our mind, wilt thou make them blind, or persuade them that they are blind, that they do not see what is visible to all that have eyes, to wit, that thou hast deceived them, and broken faith and promise given to them? Or wilt thou lead them about like blind men, whither thou pleasest, one time toward Canaan, another time toward Egypt again?” In other words, Moses, we know what these men saw. These men are right; you are wrong. We will not come up.

We will not recognize your authority or your summons. There is indeed a difference between God-ordained authority and usurped authority. We are certainly not obligated to obey usurped authority, but we are obliged to obey God’s ordained authority. At this particular time, Moses and Aaron were indeed God’s ordained authority.

It was their perception and interpretation of the facts that caused them to disobey. They did not perceive correctly or biblically. Their wicked hearts had interpreted everything wrongly, and they did so to justify their rebellion.

Although Moses was the meekest man on earth, meekness does not equate to cowardice. “And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the Lord, Respect not their offering. I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.” Moses was angry, and rightfully so. There is such a thing as righteous anger. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26, “Be ye angry, and sin not.” Moses did not attempt to vindicate himself, but asked the Lord to vindicate him and to respect not their offerings.

That is, do not regard them or honor them. Thus Moses was declaring his innocence before God: "I am not taking one thing from them." Learn this: It does no good to declare your innocence or justify yourself before men who hate and despise you. They will not listen, nor do they want to listen. Their minds are made up; their perception and interpretation of the facts are, in their own estimation, correct, and nothing will change their perspective.

That is why David, who understood this principle, said in Psalm 7:10, "My defence is of God, who saveth the upright in heart." In other words, "God, You have to defend me. I cannot defend myself before such wicked men, before men who think wickedly and wrongly and already have their minds made up." David said the same thing in Psalm 94:22: "But the LORD is my defence, and my God is the rock of my refuge."

So Moses appealed directly to God. Godly men down through the ages have always appealed to God for vindication. The motto of the Confederate States was Deo Vindice, which means "God vindicates" or "God justifies." In adopting that motto, the South was in essence saying what David said: "My defense is of God."

Applications for Believers

We must not believe everything we hear about God's preachers and God's people. Unhappily, sometimes what we hear is true. But remember this: there are always two sides to every story. There are times when we should learn to receive things simply as information. Let it come in one ear and go out the other. It is just information. Many times, when people see and hear facts, they place their own interpretation, slant, and perspective upon those facts. It may not be the facts they are transmitting; it may be their interpretation or perspective. One reason God permits His servants and His people to be loaded down in this life with unjust and malicious slanders is so that we understand we do not receive our reward in this world.

What did our Lord warn us in John 15:18? He said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." The world will not love you for your godliness, holiness, obedience, and adherence to Scripture. The world will hate you for that, because you are different. Do not expect to be praised, recognized, or rewarded

by the ungodly in this life. You may know other preachers who are spoken well of by the world. Our Lord said in Luke 6:26, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

Let a preacher stand up and rebuke ungodliness in government, and he will not be praying at a presidential inauguration, I can assure you.

Men often use religion to disguise their rebellion and wickedness. Dathan, Abiram, and Korah were rebels; they were wicked, and they were wrong. What did they hide behind? "All God's people are holy. I'm just trying to be holy. I'm just trying to discern God's will for my life. I just want what God has for me. I just want the best." They were hiding their rebellion behind their religion.

All they wanted was their own advantage. They wanted the priesthood. There is only one real difference between Moses and Aaron and all the other people: God called Moses and Aaron; He did not call the others. That is what makes the difference. But mark it down: men will always use religion to disguise their wickedness.

The fourth application is this: we must always be sure of our facts, but we must also be sure that we do not place our interpretation and perception upon those facts. It is one thing to report facts; it is quite another to report facts based upon our own slant, viewpoint, perception, or interpretation.

If we are to interpret—and we have to interpret—and perceive, we must learn to do it biblically. As our Lord said, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." We have to learn to see everything through the spectacles of Holy Scripture, bringing everything in line with the Word of God. Any time we go beyond the Word of God, we have gone too far.

Sinful perceptions and sinful interpretations can cause enormous problems and produce death. People can be so hard-headed; it is where we get the expression, "It seems as if we never learn." Let us make sure that our interpretations are based upon the Word of God. When we perceive, let us do so biblically and scripturally.

We must not put a wicked slant on everything we hear. Contrary to the illustration used earlier, Ron is my friend, and I am not angry

with him. Whatever he wants to say to me, he can say. I am not going to interpret it wickedly. If I think he has said something a certain way, the proper response is, “Ron, what did you mean by that?” It could be taken two ways: “Were you slamming me?” If he says, “No, no, I would never do that,” that is the end of it. We must handle things biblically and scripturally.

Father, we are thankful for Jesus Christ, and for Your love and mercy. We confess that we are all guilty of having sinful perceptions and interpretations. Help us to guard against that, Lord, and make sure that whatever we see, hear, and perceive, we bring to the spectacles of the Word of God. Help us to interpret everything biblically and then act biblically based upon that scriptural interpretation. Thank You for Your grace and mercy. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Sinful Perceptions and Interpretations

Part Two of Two

SCRIPTURE READING - Numbers 16:15-35 (KJV)

And Moses was very wroth and said unto the Lord, Respect not their offering. I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them. And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the Lord, thou and they and Aaron tomorrow: and take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring you before the Lord, every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also and Aaron, each of you his censer. And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying,

> Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation? And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. So they got up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind.
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> If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.

And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them. And they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

Introduction and Review

Last week I began a message entitled “Sinful Perceptions and Sinful Interpretations.” I said that all of us use expressions such as “I perceive,” “according to my understanding,” “the way I see it,” or

“my interpretation of all of this.” You and I perceive and interpret every day, yet we usually never stop to think that our interpretations or perceptions could be wrong.

It is not that there is something wrong with the facts. Facts are indeed facts, but each of us places an interpretation upon them, viewed from our own perspective and worldview. We interpret and perceive every day; there is nothing wrong with perceiving. It is when our perceptions and interpretations are wicked that there is a problem.

Our Lord said in John 7 and verse 24, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” We rarely criticize and condemn based upon facts; what we criticize and condemn is our interpretation of the facts. I gave you certain Scriptures and many warnings from the Word of God. One was Proverbs 21 and verse 2: “every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.” Every way of a man is right in his own eyes.

We do not see anything wrong with our perception or with the way we interpret things. The Bible says in Proverbs 18:17, "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him." We always think that we are right and in the right, failing to consider one vitally important truth. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Our heart and mind are indeed wicked and deceitful. As I pointed out last week by way of introduction, the more wicked, rebellious, and vile we are, the more wicked, rebellious, and vile our perceptions and interpretations will be.

For those who were not here last week, I would challenge you to listen to the message, because I pointed out some indisputable facts. Number one, God called Moses and Aaron. Number two, God called Moses to be a prophet, priest, and king. Number three, God did indeed call Aaron to be the priest, together with his family. God used Moses and Aaron to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt. All of these things are very plainly stated in Scripture. Someone asked me afterward, "How did they know those things since the Scripture was not written?" The answer is very simple: They were there. They saw. It was the providence of God. They experienced these things firsthand.

What I am trying to show you from Numbers chapter 16 is how Dathan and Abiram and Korah, the 250 princes, and a lot of others with them, placed a false interpretation and a false perspective upon facts. We tend to forget that we interpret everything we see and everything we hear. Most of the time, it is not facts that we are discussing, but our interpretation of the facts. Henry says something to me, and I am already upset, angry, and mad with him. Whatever he says, I am going to interpret wrongfully. Why?

Because I do not like him to begin with, I am already mad at him. You see what I are saying? We place an interpretation upon everything that is being said. Moses and Aaron had been accused of being usurpers with a hidden and secret agenda. Moses was accused of trying to elevate himself and make himself king. They also accused him of mass murder, saying, "You brought us out in this wilderness to kill us." They even declared Egypt to be a land flowing with milk and honey. They were where they wanted to be, and they perverted everything.

Moses Appeals to God for Vindication

In verse 15, Moses appeals to God to defend himself: "And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the Lord, Respect not their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them." It will do you no good to defend yourself from false charges against wicked men. They already do not like you; they already hate you, and they are not going to listen. Moses is not trying to defend himself against these charges. He is asking the Lord to vindicate him, and that is exactly what God does.

Notice verse 16: "And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the Lord, thou, and they, and Aaron, tomorrow." I find verse 16 extremely interesting. There are two observations we can make. First, when Moses tells Korah and all his company to be before the Lord tomorrow, why did they come to stand before the Lord? They would not listen to Moses. Dathan and Abiram would not come up out of the tent when he sent for them. Why, then, would they come and stand before the Lord with Aaron and Moses? They would not listen to Moses, but they were willing to stand before the Lord.

The Rebels' Arrogant Confidence

Here is the second observation: It does not matter how wicked, vain, rebellious, or sinful their perspective and interpretations were. They thought they were right. They were so sure of themselves that they were willing to stand before God and let God judge them. They were willing to let God judge them despite how sinful their interpretations were.

There are people with that same smug, proud, arrogant attitude. Years ago, I was preaching in Illinois, and a young boy who was a Mormon attended the service. I preached salvation by grace through faith, and afterward he confronted me. He was angry and upset, but everything he said, I answered with Scripture.

Finally, when he could not confound me, he said, with that tone of voice, “I want to just ask you one question.” I said, “Well, ask me.” He said, “Is not God just?” I said, “Yes, sir, most definitely He is.” The young man said, “Well, all I want from God is justice.” I said, “Son, I’m afraid that’s exactly what you’re going to get. But when you get it, you’re not going to want it.”

This was the attitude of Dathan and Abiram and Korah. In verse 16, Moses tells them to stand before the Lord tomorrow. In verse 17, he says, “Take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the Lord every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.” They took every man his censer, put fire in them, laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. “And Korah gathered all the congregation” against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, “and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation.”

Here they are: Dathan and Abiram and Korah, the 250 princes, and all the people supporting them, standing before the congregation of the Lord at the tabernacle. Every man has a censer and incense. Every man believes that he is going to be accepted by God. Remember what Korah wants: the priesthood. It is not enough that he is a Levite. Dathan and Abiram were Reubenites, but Korah wanted the priesthood.

When they appear, the Lord speaks unto Moses and Aaron, saying, “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” God says, “Moses and Aaron, step aside. I’ll kill every one of them.” Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces and said, “O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?”

The Lord then told Moses to speak unto the congregation, saying, “Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.” God told Moses to step aside and He would wipe them out, but Moses again interceded. “Lord, it’s not everybody that’s sinning. Are you going to kill everybody for one man’s sin?” God instructed the people to get themselves away from Dathan and Abiram and Korah.

Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. He spake unto the congregation, saying, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins." So they got up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram on every side. Dathan and Abiram came out and stood in the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.

Notice that Dathan and Abiram were not with Korah, but consider where they were. Remember Korah and the 250 princes, evidently most of them Levites, or at least leading men. Korah had expounded the proposition that everybody was holy and everybody could do what they wanted to do. Thus they stood before the Lord with their censers, thinking they would be accepted into the priesthood. Moses went down to Dathan and Abiram, who were Reubenites, told everybody to separate from them, and Dathan and Abiram, with their families, came out and stood in the door of their tents.

Look at this picture: How smug, arrogant, sure, and certain Dathan and Abiram, the Reubenites, were that they were right. They had their wives and children standing in the door of their tents. It was as though they were saying, “We’re not going to back down. We’re not going to humble ourselves. We’re not going to acknowledge that you’re right or that God is right. We are here, and we’re not bending and we’re not bowing.”

God's Judgment: Earth Swallows the Rebels

Now look at verse 28. These people were stiff-necked and rebellious. God said through Moses, “And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me.”

Here was a simple test. If they died a natural death, God had not sent Moses; he was not God’s man, nor the one God had called. But verse 30 says, “But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.”

Moses was saying that a new thing would happen: Korah and all his company, along with Dathan and Abiram, would go down alive into the pit. If it happened, they would know that God had sent him; if it did not, they would know that God had not sent him.

“And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.” Dathan, Abiram, Korah, their families, and all that belonged to them went down alive as the earth opened, swallowed them, and closed again. Moses had scarcely finished saying this would happen if he was the one God had chosen, called, and sent. It happened.

Pay close attention to verse 34: “And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also.” Dathan, Abiram, and Korah were screaming and crying as the earth opened and swallowed them. All the congregation hastened away, crying and screaming, “Lest we get swallowed up as well.”

Fire Consumes the 250 Princes

Now look at verse 35: “And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.” These 250 princes held censers with incense on them, and God sent fire from heaven and consumed them. Listen carefully: it was by fire they sinned, and it was by fire that they died. Who alone was to offer incense? The priests.

Look in Numbers 16, and then look back to Leviticus. Even Aaron’s sons, who were legitimate and lawful priests, sinned against God, and God sent fire to consume them. When the altar was dedicated and consecrated to God, He sent the fire and lit it. The priest’s duty was to keep the fire going.

Look at Leviticus 10:1: “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” Evidently, they either let the altar’s fire go out or decided to light their own fire. Whatever they did was wicked and corrupt, and God sent fire from heaven and consumed them.

Why did God send fire from heaven and consume these 250 men? Because they were not priests. Aaron and his family were chosen to be priests—not these men. Moses and Aaron stood by them, yet they were not consumed. God was making it exceedingly clear that He had chosen Aaron and his sons to be priests, no one else.

You cannot usurp yourself into the priest’s office. You cannot usurp yourself into a prophetic office. Unless God calls you, it is wicked and wrong.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the Lord, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.”

The Memorial of the Brazen Censers

"And Eleazar the priest took the brazen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar: to be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the Lord said to him by the hand of Moses."

Two hundred and fifty men had just been consumed, but their brazen censers remained. God commanded Moses to have Aaron take them, because they had contained incense and had been held up before Him. He commanded that the censers be beaten into a broad plate and placed around the altar. Although the men had been consumed, the censers had not been destroyed; they were used to teach Israel the boundary God had established. These plates were to be "a sign unto the children of Israel." But a sign of what? They were "to be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord; that he be not as Korah, and as his company."

Whenever the children of Israel saw that brazen plate, they were to remember: No one but Aaron and his seed could offer incense unto God. This sign was to bring to their remembrance that only Aaron and his sons were to offer incense and the sacrifice. The lesson concerned both offering incense and bringing the sacrifice before the Lord. It would remind them not to try to usurp the priestly office. No one could burn incense but Aaron and his sons.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 26:14-21 (KJV)

Sometimes it seems that people never learn. Even at times, great and godly men assume too much upon themselves, usurp power, and end up getting themselves into trouble. There was a good and godly king by the name of Uzziah. Uzziah reigned for 52 years. He did a lot of good things.

But he did one thing that was very bad.

"And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by

> cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal.
>
> "And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong."
>
> "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense.
>
> "Go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God."
>
> Now watch King Uzziah's attitude. He was a king. "Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land."
>
> So here is the king who took it upon himself to go into the temple to offer incense, and God smote him with leprosy.

Let me tell you, the state has no authority in the church. The government has no authority over the things of God. I can assure you of one thing: when those bureaucrats insist on interfering with and trying to control the church of Jesus Christ, they too shall be judged by Jesus Christ.

Remember that I am dealing with the theme, sinful perceptions and sinful interpretations. Let me say this again, because I am going

to show it to you straight from the Bible. There is a difference between facts and our interpretation of the facts. You have to remember that you do, in fact, interpret everything that you see and hear. In fact, you are interpreting this message.

Why am I emphasizing this point? The answer is very simple. I do not want you to think that it is only wicked men like Dathan and Abiram and Korah who do such things. Yes, Dathan and Abiram and Korah, those 250 princes, and many of the people of the congregation were indeed wicked, and they were wrong. But we tend to think, "Well, those were wicked men, and so this could never apply to a common, ordinary, everyday Christian." And you say, "Why in the world are you telling me something that happened in the Old Testament, to Dathan and Abiram and Korah in the wilderness, and to Moses and Aaron?"

"I have nothing to do with that. It is history. It is past. It is done." I am afraid that is not true. Hold Numbers 16, but look in your Bibles first of all to Romans chapter 15 and verse 4. I want to remind you of what our Lord said. The Bible says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." The Apostle Paul said, "Whatever was written aforetime"—that is, in the Old Testament—"it was written for our learning."

In other words, there is an application that can be made to us. Look in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. I want to read several verses, showing how everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament is applicable to us today. Paul took what happened to Israel and applied it to the believers in the Corinthian church in his day.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1, he writes, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

"But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples,

to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted." Isn't that amazing? The apostle Paul said, "Whatever happened to Israel in the Old Testament is our example."

Skip down to verse 11: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." Isn't that amazing? Everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament is to be our example. It is for our admonition.

It is for our learning. All of God's Word is applicable. We need to learn everything from the Old Testament because God either uses it as an example for our obedience or as an example for our warning, which we should not follow.

Remember that God had just opened up the earth and swallowed alive Dathan, Abiram, Korah, and their families. In Numbers 16, He had just sent fire from heaven and consumed 250 princes. What did Moses pray? Moses said, "If these men die a common death, then God hadn't called me." But he also prayed, "Lord, if you open up the earth and you swallow them alive, then everybody's going to know that you called me." God opened the earth, and they were swallowed alive. Moses never asked for fire to be sent; God sent the fire and consumed the 250 princes. Could Moses open the earth? No. Could Moses close the earth? No. Could Moses call down fire? No.

Hear the facts: these men were in rebellion against God. They challenged Moses, Aaron, and God. They misinterpreted the facts. They thought they were the determiners of reality, and God sovereignly, powerfully, marvelously sent their destruction. Are we clear on that?

The Congregation's Sinful Interpretation the Next Day

Now look at verse 41. "But on the morrow," that means the next day. Numbers 16, verse 41: "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord." Wait a minute! Isn't that what got Dathan, Abiram, and Korah in trouble? Isn't that what got the 250 princes in trouble? They had just seen God open up the earth and swallow these people alive. They had just seen fire come

down from heaven. It was obviously a work of God. Yet the very next day they said to Moses and Aaron, "You are murderers. You murdered the people of the Lord." How can people misinterpret the facts so quickly? How can perception be so ignorant?

Let me read to you the comment of John Calvin: "There is something more than monstrous in this madness of theirs. The conflagration was yet smoking wherein God had appeared as the awful avenger of pride. The chasm in which the leaders of the rebellion had been swallowed up must still have been almost before their eyes. God had commanded the plates to be molten which might record that severe judgment through many succeeding ages."

All had confessed by their alarm and hasty flight that there was danger lest they themselves should be exposed to similar punishments. Yet on the next day, as if they desired deliberately to provoke God, who was still, as it were, armed, they accused God's holy servants of having been the authors of the destruction, though they never lifted a finger against their enemies. Was it in the power of Moses to command the earth to open? Could he draw down the fire from heaven at will?

Since both the chasm and the fire were manifest tokens of God's wonderful power, why did these madmen not reflect that they were engaging in fatal warfare against God? For to what purpose was this extraordinary mode of punishment? It was that, in their terror, they might learn to humble themselves beneath God's hand. Yet from it they derived only greater wildness in their audacity, as if they desired voluntarily to perish with those sinners whose punishment they had just been shuddering at.

In two ways, they betrayed their senselessness. First, by substituting Moses and Aaron as guilty of the murder in the place of God. Secondly, by sanctifying these putrid corpses. Remember, they called them the people of God. By sanctifying these putrid corpses, as if in despite of God, they accused Moses and Aaron of the slaughter, of which God had plainly shown himself to be the author, as they themselves had been compelled to feel.

Such is the blindness of the reprobate with respect to God's works, that his glory rather stupefies them than excites their admiration.

The foulest ingratitude was also added. They did not consider that only a few hours had elapsed since they had been preserved by the intercession of Moses from impending destruction. Thus, in their desire to avenge the death of a few, they called those the killers of the people of the Lord to whom they ought to have been grateful for the safety of all.

Again, what arrogance it was to count among the people of God, as if against his will, those reprobates, when he had not only cut them off from his church but had also exterminated them from the world and from the human race. Thus do the wicked wax wanton against God under the very cover of his gifts, and especially do they not hesitate to mock him with empty titles and outward signs as a mask of their iniquity. These people were mad—worse than mad. How in the world could they challenge God? How could people be so wrong in their perceptions and interpretations of reality?

How can we impugn God's men so quickly, so easily, so readily? How can we be so upset and angry, and so vile against God's people? Why is it that we cannot see things as they really are? Why are we very seldom willing to give our brethren the benefit of the doubt on anything? We are so quick to interpret what everyone does as wicked and wrong.

We place a bad interpretation upon it. I wonder if it could be anything based upon our wicked and deceitful hearts. Remember, the more rebellious, vile, and sinful we are, the worse our interpretations are going to be. Why? Because we will not look through the spectacles of Holy Scripture. We will not interpret things the way God interprets them. What we want to do is be the determiner of reality. We want to say what is.

“But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord.” Let me show you something. Verse 42 says, “And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the Lord spake unto Moses,

saying, Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment."

The Plague and Aaron's Intercession

"And they fell upon their faces. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed."

"Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah. And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed." Again, had it not been for Moses, all of them would have been wiped out. Moses told Aaron to go quickly, because God was sending the plague, and to offer the sacrifice and hold the incense. When Aaron offered the atonement, he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague stopped. An additional fourteen thousand seven hundred died. Why?

They failed to perceive that the hand of God had been against those previous sinners, and they gave a wicked, sinful interpretation and perception of the facts. It was not merely that they murmured and complained. They did murmur and complain, but their wicked hearts drove them to condemn the innocent. Their wicked hearts gave them their wicked perception and interpretation.

Remember, the Scripture teaches, "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." You would think that, after these two very drastic and dramatic incidents, the people would have learned an important lesson. And they did learn, did they not? I could ask that question another way: In listening to these two messages, we have learned from them, haven't we? Scripture is plain and simple when it describes and reveals our wicked and depraved nature. One way we know that the Bible is the word of God is that it never, ever tries to cover up our sins and wickedness.

Continued Rebellion in Numbers 20

That is an amazing fact. If man had authored Scripture on his own, everything would have been prim and proper, with nothing revealed about our corruption and depravity. But Scripture never covers up our sin. My question is, do you think they learned? How plain were these lessons? How obvious? If you really think they learned, look in the book of Numbers, chapter 20. Let us begin reading with verse 1: "Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there." Now look what happens: "And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron." Notice that it was the congregation that gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

It was not just Dathan, Abiram, and Korah, or the two hundred fifty princes. It seemed that the entire congregation was against Moses and Aaron. I have often wondered how Moses and Aaron could put up with such a rebellious, wicked, bellyaching, complaining people. I could also ask how God could put up with such a wicked, rebellious, complaining, bellyaching people. In Numbers 16, God told Moses, "Step aside and I'll kill every one of them." Moses intervened, interceded, and prayed, "Oh no Lord, don't do that." Yet there were times when Moses became so angry and upset that he prayed to God, "Kill every one of them." If Moses and God had ever gotten together, there would never have been an Israelite left. Now the whole congregation was gathered against Moses and Aaron.

Look at verse 3: "And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!" What? Wait a minute.

The word "chode" here in the Hebrew means to quarrel, contend, argue, or strive against. They were not trying to work with Moses or help him. They did not come and say, "Moses, we're thirsty. Do you think we could dig a well somewhere? Do you think we could look for some water somewhere?" They simply fought against him, contended with him, and strove against him. They were not trying to work things out; they were murmuring, bellyaching, and

complaining. They said, “Would to God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord.” They contended with Moses in a wrangling and litigious manner.

They showed neither reverence for his office nor respect for his person. They quickly forgot all the blessings God had heaped upon them through Moses and Aaron. Moreover, they did this when they should have been consoling and helping Moses and Aaron. What had just happened in verse 1? Miriam, their sister, had just died. They did not come and say, “Moses, we’re sorry for the loss of your sister.”

“What did you do, bring us out here to die? You’re trying to kill us with thirst. Would to God we had died with our brethren.” Can you imagine the wicked inference in verse 3, when they say, “Would to God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord”? Instead of giving thanks, as they ought to have done, for God sparing them, they despise God’s mercy and reprieve. They quarrel with God as if He had done them a great injustice by sparing their lives. They are literally saying, “We’d have been better off dying when God sent the fire, or when God sent the plague, or when God opened the earth.” Let me ask you: had you rather be struck down by God’s judgment or spared by God’s mercy?

What’s wrong with these people? What’s wrong with us today? I hear professing Christians say, “Well, I just don’t want to die. If God would just go ahead and take me.” Listen, I want to live as long as I can live by the grace of God. I want to serve Him and be a blessing to His people. I know I’m going to die, but I’m not wanting to die. I’m not wishing for God to kill me. That’s what these people were wishing for. They were wishing that God would kill them. When they say, “Would to God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord,” in other words, they are saying, “We want to be dead.”

My first thought was this: that can be arranged. You just keep crying and praying, and God is going to give you your heart's desire. In fact, I'm going to be preaching some messages along this line in the next few weeks. But they got exactly what they prayed for.

Look at verses 4 and 5. Once they say, "We wish we were dead," they ask Moses, "And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die

there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink."

They were angry that they had been brought up out of Egypt and led through the wilderness. Remember, they were in the wilderness because of their own sin and rebellion. It was not Moses' fault, and it was not Aaron's fault. They quarreled with Moses over what they knew was their own responsibility. They referred to Canaan land, where they were to go, as "this evil place."

Now note this: they had not been thirsty long. Because their needs were not met instantly—immediately—they were saying that this was an indescribable hardship: "Nobody's handed me a bottle of water. This is so difficult. This is so hard. Would to God I died when God smoked down all the rest of the people. Would to God I'd be in Egypt." What?

Now, to show you that we never learn, look in verse 6: "And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying," and Moses then was to take the rod and get water for them.

But watch this. Instead of crying to God and asking Him for water, these people complained against the very men God had used to bless and help them. They were saying, "I'd rather be dead; I'd rather be back in Egypt." In other words, they preferred slavery over liberty, the house of bondage over the land of promise, and ignorance and idolatry over truth and redemption.

Do you realize the average professing Christian, the average American, is no different from these ungrateful, wicked Israelites in Numbers 16 and Numbers 20? No difference. We prefer slavery to freedom, socialism to free enterprise, and governmental control to self-discipline, responsibility, and reliance. We grumble and complain when things are not given to us instantly and immediately. We always place our own interpretation, from our own perspective and worldview, upon the facts, and we fail to distinguish between facts and our interpretation of the facts. Your interpretation of the

facts does not necessarily mean that it is factual. There is a difference between the facts and the interpretation of the facts.

Applications for Believers Today

The godliest men are oftentimes attacked by the ungodliest men. Unhappily, often the godliest men are attacked by well-meaning Christians and brethren who think that their perception and interpretation of the facts are reality. We judge, hate, criticize, and condemn each other based upon our interpretation of the facts.

No wonder Paul told Timothy, as a young pastor, “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” I never will forget old Dr. Bob Jones Sr. used to say that he prayed this prayer and advised everybody else to pray it: “Lord, make my heart tender and my hide tough.” Because, as ignorant and unknowledgeable as the average professing Christian is today, we need a tough hide.

Instead of working with each other, we end up working against each other. We have to keep our hearts and mind in Christ Jesus. We have to learn to perceive and interpret based upon the Word of God. We have to remember that God is the determiner of reality. Reality is not what we think, hope, interpret, or perceive. Reality is what God says it is.

Every gossiper, every slanderer, every rumor monger is only spreading his or her interpretation of the facts. That is why God said, “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people.” There are some things that ought not to be told even if they are true. Why? Because it is no one else’s business. I have said it a hundred times: if you cannot be part of the solution, do not be part of the problem.

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