

It says in our Parsha Numbers 16: 33:

וַיֵּרְדוּ הֵם וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם חַיִּים שְׂאֵלָה וַתִּכַּס עָלֵיהֶם הָאָרֶץ וַיִּאֲבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקְּהָל:

“They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst<sup>1</sup> of the congregation.” What is the end result of Korach and his rebellious 250? There is a difference of opinion in Gemara Sanhedrin. Sanhedrin 108a that says: Rabbi Akiva says, ‘the assembly of Korah is not destined to arise for resurrection, as it is stated: “And the earth closed upon them” (Numbers 16:33), meaning in this world, and also: “And they vanished from among the assembly” (Numbers 16:33), meaning in the World-to-Come.’

Rabbi Eliezer says: About them the verse says: “The Lord kills and makes alive; He lowers to the grave, and raises” (I Samuel 2:6), indicating that the assembly of Korah has a share in the World-to-Come.

So, this seems like they were cut off as part of Bnei Yisrael but they still have Olam Habaoh. Do non-Jews have Olam Habaoh, or were Korach assembly reunited as Yisrael in Olam Habaoh? And what does Rabbi Eliezer do with the rest of the passuk?

Later in Sanhedrin it clarifies a little bit: Sanhedrin 109b: The Sages taught in a *baraisa* (*Tosefta* 13:9): The members of the assembly of Korah have no share in the World-to-Come, as it is stated: “And the earth closed upon them” (Numbers 16:33), meaning in this world, and also: “And they vanished from among the assembly” (Numbers 16:33), meaning in the World-to-Come; this is the statement of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira says: Although it says that they vanished, they are like a lost item that is sought, ultimately found, and rehabilitated, as it is stated: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your mitzvos.” (Psalms 119:176).

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<sup>1</sup> “midst” is the word used by the Gemara to tell us what a minyan is for *dvarim shebikdusha*. Thus, they were “lost” from the minyan of Klal Yisrael.

There is hope, even for those that rebelled. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira, who says like or can explain the position of Rabbi Eliezer, seems to say that he may agree they are cut off and lost, per the passuk. But there is a chance that they will end up in the Olam Habaoh. That is for the general assembly. They can still get Olam Habaoh. At that point they perished, but with rehabilitation and with looking at the entire merit of the person, not just this one deed of rebellion, they can still get Olam Habaoh.

Ibin Ezra has explains our passuk when it says “they vanished.” He says, that since their children died with them, they had no progeny so their families were gone, their branches ended there. This is a type of death and cut-off, too. They no longer had connection to the Israelite nation. However, we can say that they do have a portion in the World to Come.

Ramban takes a more literal position saying that they vanished from sight. The pit closed around them so they vanished. Sforno and Haemek Hadvar also take the task of explaining what happened from a physical level. The earth closed as if it had never opened. These explanations seem to suggest that in *gashmius* they disappeared so in *ruchnius* they disappeared, never to be heard from again, including World to Come.

So where is the indication that there is any hope for the Korah assembly? And does Korach himself have a chance to get to Olam Habaoh?

Chizkuni offers an explanation to who is redeemed and why, for the World to Come. On the words “וירדו הם” “they descended, they;” Which are the people that descended—not only Korach’s family or household members—but also the sympathizers, over and beyond the two hundred and fifty people mentioned at the beginning of this episode. They are the ones that descended into the bowels of the earth. The word: הם is a limitation, excluding the two hundred and fifty men who had offered incense, seeing they had done so at the invitation of Moses.

Although they had been totally wrong, their motivation was noble so that they died by being burned on the spot, but presumably were buried with a proper burial. It says two passukim later, in 35 that the fire went and consumed the 250 people who brought the incense.

Just as their incense pans were used as covers for the altar subsequently, ([Numbers 17:3](#)), so too, they got burial. However, the people who had not followed Moses' advice were the ones that descended into the bowels of the earth. Actually, of Dasan and Aviram the Torah reports that they were burned to death (and that they descended into the bowels of the earth. [Deut. 11.6](#). So Dasan and Aviram got both.

Accordingly, Chizkuni is saying that the 250 people were not even those that were swallowed up and vanished. They died and were cut-off from the people. But they get a place in the World to Come. It is the sympathizers who join the rabble just to make machlokes and not to determine who is correct, who did nothing positive, they were swallowed up and, according to Rabbi Akiva, them with Korach have no place in the World to Come. However, we can ask, didn't Korach also take a pan to offer incense? He also wanted to determine, based on Moshe's invitation, who was correct.

Let's take one final look at the severity of the punishment and then we can conclude if we will see them again in the World to Come, may we merit a place there. Ohr HaChaim says:

“וירדו... חיים שאולה,” ‘they descended into Sheol while still alive.’ The earth did not kill them but they remained alive so that the bowels of the earth became their Gehinom. The reason the Torah did not say חיים לשאול, but חיים שאולה is that although generally speaking when a word should have the letter ל at the beginning, the letter ה at the end of that word can substitute for the missing letter ל at the beginning, the Torah does not make such changes arbitrarily, without a reason. In this instance the Torah hinted by means of this construction that after Korach and

associates descended they did not die but were given the ability to remain alive. This is what is meant by *Sanhedrin* 100 that G'd gives the wicked the ability to experience their punishment. If they were to die too soon they would not suffer the pain of HaShem's retribution. If the Torah had written לשאול instead of שאולה, the meaning would have been that they died as soon as they arrived in Gehinom.

We can also say that letter 'heh' at the end of the word instead of 'lamed' is a destined destination. Like when Avraham or the Bnei Yisrael went down to Metzrayim. It was destined. This was destined, too, this was their intended destination. They were cut off and vanished but they were alive. However, was this their final destination (like it was not Avraham's or the the Bnei Yisrael when they went down to Mitzrayim)? Now, as far as the 250 that gave incense we can say one of two ways:

First, this lends well for the 250 because they could not be burned in Sheol if in passuk 35 it says a fire went from HaShem and burned them, *after*, the rest were swallowed. The 250 were alive, and on *terra firma*. Then they were burned and buried like Chizkuni.

Second, the fire went forth from HaShem when they all arrived in Sheol. They arrived alive there but then the fire consumed them.

We can say a third point and renew the question of where is Korach in all this?

It says in *Sanhedrin* 110a 'It was taught in a *baraisa*: Korah was both among the burned and among the swallowed. He was among the swallowed, as it is written: "And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them with Korah" (Numbers 26:10). He was among the burned, as it is written: "And fire came forth from the Lord, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men that burned the incense" (Numbers 16:35), and Korah was with them.' Accordingly, was Korach

miraculously swallowed up but then also removed from Sheol and burned and consumed. This does not make sense. How can he be swallowed and then be burned and consumed? It must be the Gemara is saying his destiny lies with both, those that were swallowed and those that were consumed.

Those that were meant to suffer and be cut-off from the World to Come, Korach, and those that joined but did nothing productive, they were swallowed up and they remained being punished burning alive. If they remain alive they cannot merit the World to Come. The 250 were consumed, they died and they can merit the World to Come.

Finally, we can say like Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira and Rabbi Yehoshua. They were punished for their crimes and they can merit World to Come after reviewing their entire lives and seeing their merits and then being deemed fit for the World to Come.

It says in Avot D'Rabbi Natan 36:2 'Korah and his company will not be granted eternal life, and will not even be given a trial, as it says (Numbers 16:33), "The earth closed over them, and they vanished from the midst of the congregation." These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer. But Rabbi Yehoshua said: They will be given a trial! It is about them that the verses speak (I Samuel 2:6), "The Eternal deals death and gives life, casts down into Sheol and raises up." The verse there (Numbers 16:33) speaks of Sheol: "They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them." And the verse (in I Samuel) speaks of Sheol. So just as later one can be cast down into Sheol or raised up from it, so too, when Sheol is mentioned here, they go down into it, but will one day be raised up from it. Rabbi Eliezer said: Then how do you interpret the verse, "The earth closed over them, and they vanished from the midst of the congregation"? [Rabbi Yehoshua] responded: They vanished from the midst of the congregation, but they did not vanish from the World to Come.'

Interestingly, now Rabbi Eliezer has the same opinion as Rabbi Akiva. However, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva agree. In Sanhedrin Rabbi Akiva says “assembly of Korah is not destined to arise for resurrection.” Here it says “Korach and his company.” So Rabbi Eliezer has the opinion that it is Korach and the adders-on who will not have any merit in the World to Come. So grave is their sin. They are punished like these in the World to Come (those swallowed to be gone forever) and like these in this world (the 250 who are removed from Israel). However, the 250 who are not mentioned in our passuk, but only burned and consumed alive in passuk 35, Rabbi Akiva would agree with Rabbi Eliezer that they can merit the World to Come. Rabbi Yehoshua then argues and gives a more merciful approach when he says about Korach and his assembly, those that added on. They went down to Sheol and they can be raised up. They, too, got kores, were cut off, them and their children vanished forever from progeny in the People of Israel. However, they can have a trial, be viewed to have suffered punishment, and they can also have a place in the World to Come.

Just as Korach has a possible place in the World to Come so, too, the 250 incense offerors, and certainly, regular yiddin who do not rebel against HaShem outright in public. We should merit to always strive to the truth, to remain firmly enrooted in the *terra firma* of Klal Yisrael, and also merit our place in the World to Come.