

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Korach – 5783

D. Mordechai Schlachter

Korach commences a challenge.

וַיִּקְמוּ לְפָנָי מֹשֶׁה וְאַנְשֵׁי מִבְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַתָּים וְנָשִׂאֵי עֲדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד
אֲנָשֵׁי-שֵׁם:

“And they stood up before Moshe, and two-hundred and fifty men from Bnei Yisroel, congregation presidents, appointed advocates, men of repute.” (Bamidbar 16:2).

Who are these people? Who “stood up” before Moshe? Is that Korach and the men mentioned in the previous pasuk? Are the descriptives “congregation presidents, appointed advocates, men of name” referring to them or to the two-hundred and fifty additional? Or are there different categories of people? The next pasuk says “they gathered upon Moshe and upon Aharon.” (Ibid 16:3). Did they gather or did they stand up, and is there a difference?

The answer to these questions is in understanding *when* they stood up. This will also explain what they “stood up” for. The Korach challenge took place during the same time that the Scouts returned with their evil scouting report against the Land. The Scouts were chosen, sent, and spent forty days exploring Eretz Yisroel. Korach and those mentioned here were left behind. They all felt slighted and skipped over. They gathered and stood up to Moshe. Then they were joined by the Scouts upon their return. Korach’s treason was quashed, the Scouts were destroyed, and Bnei Yisroel was given its forty-year sentence.

This chronology is apparent from the pesukim. Korach stood up now with the incident of the Scouts. Korach may not know that his years were numbered. The Torah does not explicitly state what Korach’s challenge was. The implication is that he wanted a leadership position. This incident took place during the grape ripening season (late summer that second year). (Ibid 13:20). He was already a Levi, he was already working in the Mishkan, and being from Kehas, he was helping with korbanos. The explanation is, he was aligned with the scouts. Either to challenge the forty-year sentence – thus not really believing that Hashem determined it – or to gain a position in the desert just as the Scouts wanted to remain in the desert.

The people he paid for (נִקְחָה in the Torah means purchased) and the 250 that joined him were all those who felt left out. They were not chosen to be presidents of their Shevet and help in the census or lead the encampments, and they were not chosen to scout the Land. Korach felt left out because Shevet Levi was not represented in either selection. They desired to be important.

There were two sets of those that challenged Moshe. There was Korach and those he paid to join him. (Ibid 16:1). Then there were the two hundred and fifty that stood up on their own. (Ibid 16:2). Moshe responds to the challenge: “It is too much for you all,

the congregation, all of you holy people that are among Hashem.” (Ibid 16:3). “The congregation” refers to the Scouts. (See M’M Parshas Shlach 5783 that הַעֲדָה “the congregation” means the Scouts). Likewise, it said, Moshe chose men to Scout the land but did not choose from Shevet Levi. (Ibid 13:16). Moshe includes the Scouts, even though the pasuk does not refer to them here, because earlier it said, upon their return they “went and they came to Moshe and Aharon.” (Ibid 13:26). The double wording is they went back to the Israel camp and then came to Moshe and gathered with Korach.

Moshe hears their complaint and falls on his face. (Ibid 16:4). This is prayer to find out how to deal with the challenge. Moshe challenges the rabble back, asking what more could they want as they are already Leviim and leaders. (Ibid 16:10). Dasan and Aviram complained that they left a “land flowing with milk and honey” to come to the desert. (Ibid 16:13). Even if they do get to the Land that is flowing with milk and honey, but at what cost? (Ibid 16:14). Similarly, the Scouts admitted that the Land flowed with milk and honey (ibid 13:27) but the inhabitants are too great (ibid 13:29).

Hashem wants to annihilate the nation in an instant. (Ibid 16:21). However, Moshe and Aharon fall on their faces and beg that the entire nation is not destroyed with them. (Ibid 16:22). Earlier it said, Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces to defend Bnei Yisroel. (Ibid 14:5).

The Scouts kept instigating Bnei Yisroel. (Ibid 14:1). Bnei Yisroel “complained” (וַיִּלִּנוּ) to Moshe saying they will likely die in the desert. (Ibid 14:2). Here, they “complained” (וַיִּלִּנוּ) to Moshe that he brought death upon the people. (Ibid 17:6). Amidst all this turmoil, Hashem then appeared in the Ohel Moed. (Ibid 17:8). Earlier, the Torah also said that while the Scouts tried to stone Yehoshua and Calev, Hashem appeared at the Ohel Moed. (Ibid 14:10). This appearance now makes sense.

Hashem now sought to destroy the entire people. (Ibid 17:11). Previously it said Hashem wanted to destroy the entire nation with a plague. (Ibid 14:12). Here, while Moshe saved the nation, another fourteen thousand died in a plague. (Ibid 17:14). By the Scouts, Moshe begged for Bnei Yisroel’s forgiveness. (Ibid 14:19). Hashem ultimately relented. (Ibid 14:20). Hashem expressed frustration at how long the Scouts would speak out against Him. (Ibid 14:27). The Scouts died by plague. (Ibid 14:37). The earth opened to swallow Korach and his immediate followers (ibid 16:32) and a fire went forth and burned the two-hundred and fifty men that joined in (ibid 16:35). This is what is referenced previously when the Torah records that part of the nation gathered to make trouble in the eyes of Hashem, and they died in a fire that consumed the edges of the camp. (Ibid 11:1). It is clear now how the Korach challenge coincided with the Scouts’ evil reports. The two parties “gathered” and were one and the same.

Finally, “And they stood before Moshe.” They did not come “to” Moshe. They stood before him, as if equals. It was not to complain but to displace him.

“Two-hundred and fifty men” who considered themselves “congregation presidents, appointed advocates, men of repute.” This is what they thought of themselves. Instead, they ended up being destroyed.