

The Rebellion of Korah

Good Morning.

Proverbs 17:22 "A cheerful heart is good medicine."

It's good to be back. It's been four months since I made the last presentation, and I have sincerely missed the privilege of sharing the Word of God – however inadequately I may do it.

My style is different than most of the other speakers – they're a lot prettier than I am, and so I tend to use a lot of pretty slides to compensate. OK...

- Martin Luther: *"The God of this world is riches, pleasure and PRIDE."*

Today, we will read of an incident that traditionally has been called '*Rebellion of Korah*'. It's a tale about how insidious PRIDE and ENVY can be.

This topic seems the polar opposite of the season we're now in: the Season of Advent, a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas. The term is an anglicized version of the Latin word '*adventus*', meaning "*coming*". **What does a rebellion of Israelites – you may ask – have to do with Advent, *the Coming of the Christ Child*?** Well, I'll start to answer the question by posing another question:

- WHY WAS THE CHRIST-CHILD COMING?

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A: Christ came to reestablish the relationship between God and mankind that had been destroyed in the Garden because of Adam's pride.

We all know the Christmas song 'Away in the Manger'. There's another 'in the Manger' song that speaks about the reestablishment of the relationship.

SLIDE: SONG LYRICS

The song is "He Made a Way in the Manger":¹

“Longing for a savior
A hopeless world would wait
Sin demanded justice
At a price we could not pay
But God displayed his mercy
The greatest gift of love
When we could not reach heaven
Heaven came to us
He made a way in a manger
A way to the cross.”

Christ came to make “a way” – a way back to God's presence. God made a way – thru Christ, beginning in a manger and finishing at the Cross.

¹ Lee Black and Steve Merkel

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In the Book of Numbers that we've been discussing, God was providing a *temporary* mechanism – thru the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system – whereby He can again dwell with people and they not be immediately killed for violating His holiness.

➤ It was temporary – **but it WAS real in that time.**

Eventually, God would even go beyond what Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden and actually dwell in people in power, but that was only after the crucifixion, resurrection and Pentecost. However, this relationship could only be on HIS holy terms, and therefore, **He had to make the first move to let us know what those terms are.**

And, in order to do that, God – **the offended party** and Creator of the Universe – **HUMBLED** Himself IN THE WILDERNESS TABERNACLE, and LATER IN A MANGER, and finally on the Cross. The cloud above the Tabernacle was an early example of Immanuel – God with us. This was done so that he might dwell with a bunch of very stubborn people like us. No wonder why he says that His thoughts are far above ours.

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SLIDE: SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Back in Catholic junior-high, I had the nuns for teachers. I think all nuns had a reputation for being strict, but these women were actually very kind, although they did employ rulers across the knuckled when needed. They cared for us but they didn't take any guff from students. **They were sort of the Levites of the Catholic Church – very tough when they had to be.**

In our religious instruction, the nuns had us memorize something called the seven deadly sins, which are – as I vaguely remember – wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. Each is a form of Idolatry-of-Self. While each of the seven deadly sins is mentioned in scripture, there actually is no specific verse which list them, nor are any of them ever called "*deadly sins*".² The Book of Proverbs does state that, "six things the Lord hates, and seven that are an abomination unto Him"³, namely:

1. A proud look
2. A lying tongue
3. Hands that shed innocent blood
4. A heart that devises wicked plots
5. Feet that are swift to run into mischief

² The attribution probably comes from Galatians 5:19-21, where Paul lists a number of sins that, if practiced, will result in "...shall not inherit the Kingdom of God."

³ Proverbs 6:16-19

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6. A deceitful witness that utters lies
7. He that sows discord among brethren

There are several other variations of the seven deadly sins, but in almost every list of major sins, **Pride is almost universally #1.**

Today's story in Numbers is about a group of people who think that **their own status in society and their own good works** makes them Holy enough to approach God and enter onto Holy Ground. This is a rebellion against God. Now, they don't see it as rebellion against Yehovah; they see it as a revolt against the status and privilege of men (Moses and Aaron).

- That's their big problem – **they don't** see it as a rebellion against God.

And – to tell the truth – **neither did YOU OR I see it before the Holy Spirit drew us to Christ.**

OK – before we get into Numbers Chapter 16, I want to read two very familiar Scriptural passages that I think apply to this story:

SLIDE: WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT?

The Pharisees, seeking to trap Jesus into saying something theologically flawed, asked Him the question:
"Master, what is the Greatest Commandment?"

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SLIDE: THE SHEMA

Jesus answered: "Hear O Israel! The Lord our God, The Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."⁴

It is known as the *Shema* by the Jews, 'Shema' meaning "*Hear and Understand.*"

Now, I must admit that the first time I read Jesus' response as a kid, I was confused – this is not one of the 10 commandments that I memorized for the nuns. I eventually learned the Torah (five books written by Moses) actually contains 613 Commandments. The 10 commandments that were written by God on two stone tablets at Mt. Sinai are somewhat like God's *Cliff Notes* version.

OK – the person was asking Jesus which of the 613 commandments in the Law (the Torah) is greatest as a test to trip Him up. Of the 613 commands in the Torah, the greatest commandment – according to Jesus – is the one stated in Deuteronomy Chapter 6:

"Shema Yisrael! Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad..."

We Christians tend to remember only the second part of Jesus' answer (*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all*

⁴ Matthew 22

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your soul and with all your strength) and treat the first part (*Hear O Israel! The Lord our God, The Lord is one*) as merely an introduction.

➤ Treating *anything* Jesus says as merely fluff is not recommended.

So, I've take the liberty of clarifying the meaning of the passage – my *New Ghent NY Translation*:

SLIDE: MY 'NEW GHENT NY' TRANSLATION

There are two parts to the greatest commandment:

- 1) *"Israel – listen up! You must believe that there is only One God – ADONAI (Yehovah).*
- 2) *You are to love Him with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."*

The command is that we 1st must recognize that Yehovah is the only God, and His name is Yehovah. Once that is done, then we are to worship and serve Him alone with our everything. The first part establishes Who Is God – and we are told that *it is not us*, even though our Pride says that we are more special than the next guy, and therefore God is mandated to accept us on our own good works.

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- Why is Pride *the greatest sin*, the root sin, the sin that damned Lucifer? Because it *violates the greatest commandment* – Adonai is the One and only God.

SLIDE: DEER

The 2nd passage of scripture I want to mention is a familiar one for many of us:

"As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God." Psalm 42

I'll mention how this fits in a little bit later.

SLIDE – KORAH'S REBELLION

OK – Chapter 16 in the Book of Numbers.

- **READ NUMBERS Chapters 16**

SLIDE: The REBELLION

Here's the situation. In Numbers 13–14, the Israelites were discouraged by the reports of the scouts that the Canaanites in

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the Promised Land were like giants and unbeatable. By and large, the nation refused to believe God's promises of guaranteed victory. For failing the test of faith, the Israelites have been ordered by God to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all those men in the army (20-years old and up) die off.⁵

- By the way -- metaphor of "Going around the mountain for 40 YEARS" to learn some lesson is a nice saying but it is WRONG! The Israelites went around the mountain in order to **die off**.

Can you imagine **how discouraged the people would have been**? Imagine if **you** were told that you're going to wander around in the City of Hudson until you die, and then your children would get to go to Disneyland. Not a reason to rejoice.

But some saw this discouraging situation as an opportunity for advancing their status and their agenda. As Rahm Emanuel⁶ said when he was President Obama's Chief of Staff:

"You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before."

⁵ Numbers 14:29: "In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me."

⁶ Ironically, Rahm Emanuel is actually Jewish and his middle name is 'Israel'. His father was born in Jerusalem. The name 'Rahm' means 'high' or 'lofty', a good description of Pride.

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This was an opportunity – let's take advantage of the people's discouragement and assume leadership and lead the people back to Egypt. After all, the food was better there.

The ringleader of the rebellion is a man named Korah, who is a high ranking member of the Levite's most prestigious clan of Kohath. Jewish tradition says that Korah was motivated in part by the fact that Elitzafan, the son of his father's brother, was appointed prince over his family.⁷ Korah flames the smoldering historical resentments in the tribe of Reuben and the spiritual pride of some leading men of the other tribes to get supporters for his rebellion against Moses and Aaron. The other ringleaders are Dathan and Abiram – who are brothers – and an individual named 'On', all three being from the tribe of Reuben.

So how does this unlikely group of co-conspirators – in the midst of a 3 million person encampment – find each other?

SLIDE: LAYOUT OF THE ISRAELITE CAMP

Here's the layout of the Israelite encampment with the Tabernacle in the middle. The 12 tribes are grouped in threes camping around the outside and the Levites are encamped closest to the Tabernacle.

⁷ “The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel.” (Numbers 3:30).

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Notice where the tribe of Reuben camped and when the clan of Kohath camped. They are camped next to each other on the south side of the Israelite encampment. They lived right next to one another – they talked over the backyard fence as they swapped recipes, gossip, and in this case – rebellion.

But, these weren't the only ones involved in the coup attempt; we are told in verse 2 that 250 other men of Israel... well-known and respected leaders from various other tribes... sided with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. It is clear from the account, however, that it is Korah who is the chief instigator.

The primary accusation is that Moses and Aaron have taken too much power for themselves and set down too many rules and have enriched themselves in both prestige and status. Now – remember: back at Mt. Sinai, when God spoke to the people and everyone heard His voice, **the people were afraid** and begged Moses to talk to God in their place and tell them what He said. So, since then, God's communication has been just with Moses and sometimes with Moses/Aaron; the people have had to take Moses' word as to what God is saying in a particular circumstance. **They're now accusing Moses of *embellishing what God was saying* for the benefit of himself and his family.**

- We hear an echo of that ancient rebellious suggestion: “Did God really say...”⁸

⁸ Genesis 3:1

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SLIDE: DATHAN'S PICTURE

By the way – this is the only known photo of Dathan. (picture of Edward G. Robinson in the ten Commandments.)

SLIDE: REBELLION CLOAKED IN SPIRITUAL LANGUAGE

"And Korah...and Dathan and Abiram and On... gathered against Moses and Aaron; they said to them, 'It is enough for you, since the **entire congregation are all completely holy** and ADONAI in their midst. Why do you lift yourselves up above the assemblage of ADONAI?'" Numbers 16:2-3

Very spiritual rhetoric – "all the nation is holy". We sometimes can hear a similar thing today in churches *when someone wants to get their own way* – – **"God told me such and such"** – maybe He did, and maybe He didn't, but the phrase is often meant to stifle disagreement, because who would want to argue against God? That's why a gift of discernment is greatly needed in the churches.

So, the rebels are saying:

- *Why Aaron, do WE carry the furniture and you just look on?*
- *Why Aaron, do WE do the hard work to set up the Tabernacle and you 'minister' inside?*

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- *The whole congregation is Holy, why is it that YOU have all the privileges and WE just observe?*
- *I've got a good voice, Moses, so why can't I yell 'Let God arise and His enemies be scattered'?" ?*

Now, Korah was partly correct in his premise – the whole congregation WAS holy. However, *the issue was not who is holy*, but who is "HOLY ENOUGH" to approach God.

Moses would have certainly agreed that he was no better than anyone else. He also would agree that all Israelites were God's chosen people. But God is sovereign and He had made certain choices about who can approach Him. Korah just didn't accept Moses' word about what God said. Korah obviously didn't agree that these choices were logical. But, just like today, not everyone is chosen by God to be an elder or music leader or Sunday school teacher or whatever. The Holy Spirit gives gifts as He wishes.

- **Korah was touching a *proverbial high-voltage line* – and didn't realize it.**

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FOUNDATIONAL QUESTION:

- Can WE approach God on OUR terms, based on our own merits and our own good works, or MUST – MUST – we come through Yahweh's chosen way – the CROSS OF CHRIST?

Jesus answered that – “I AM the way and the truth and the life. NO ONE comes to the Father except through me.”⁹

Pride down thru history...

By the way, we don't hear any more of the fellow 'ON son of Peleth' who was mentioned in verse 1 of Chapter 13. Evidently he didn't persist in the rebellion. Jewish oral tradition suggests that his wife objected to his participation. Supposedly, she said: “No matter who wins this argument, dear – whether it is Dathan or Moses – **you're** still going to be just a peon and not in charge of anything – so stay out of it!” ON replied to her: ‘but I gave my word’. ‘I will save you’ she said. So, she gets him intoxicated and laid him down inside the tent. She then sat at the entrance to the tent and loosened her hair, as if she were bathing. Whoever came to

⁹ John 14:6

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call her husband saw her and went back. When On awakened, it was all over.¹⁰

- That meant that the rebellion would have had to **CARRY 'ON'**...without him.

SLIDE: (progressive): KORAH'S AMBITION WAS PRIESTHOOD

As you may remember, there are three Levite clans – the Clan of Gershon was responsible for the fabrics and their supporting poles/cords, etc.; the Clan of Merari was responsible for heavier structural components; and the clan of Kohath had the greatest privilege – and faced the greatest danger – because they carried the holy furniture, such as the Ark of the Covenant.

OK – here's Korah's gripe: Within the overall clan of Kohath, there were four basic families as you can see here...

- Korah, Moses and Aaron are all from the clan of Kohath – although just in different families. This means that they were **COUSINS**

So, Korah was saying: Did God *really* say to Moses that only Aaron and his sons (i.e.; Moses' nephews) could be priests? Or was there some Nepotism involved here?

¹⁰ <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wife-of-on-ben-pelet-midrash-and-aggadah>

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It is important to note what the rebellion was **NOT** about. Korah didn't deny that God had acted thru Moses (10 plagues, Red Sea, manna, and so on. Korah's claim was that Moses failed as a leader in not getting them into the Promised Land, and that Moses – rather than God – made up a lot of these decisions on status and authority and he *attributed* them to God.

Now, the tribe of Reuben had a different issue.

SLIDE (progressive): REUBEN'S AMBITION WAS LEADERSHIP

Here are the sons of Jacob – you will remember that God changed Jacob's name to Israel. Reuben was the first son born to Jacob. Now, there are two privileges that come with being 'Firstborn' when your father dies: leadership of the Family and a double portion of the estate inheritance.

- **In Hebrew society, "Firstborn" is a first and foremost a TITLE in Hebrew society.** The title normally IS associated with the first son *born*, but *not always*. The father determines who is has the 'Firstborn' title.

Let me give an example using the Otterbeck family again. Bill and Bunny had three daughters – Jennifer, Kristin and Sandra,

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and then along came Jon, late to the party. In Hebrew society, Jon is the Firstborn!

- Sorry ladies, the title of Firstborn is exclusively for the male of the species. However, you do have some advantages here – for example, Exodus 10th plague – death of the firstborn – girls and ladies were not in danger because they could not be firstborns

Now, if Bill and Bunny have another son next year – Bunny, I hope I'm not letting out any secrets – *that* son would be the 2nd born, unless Jon messes up royally (finishes last in chili cook-off three years in a row). Then, Bill could give the **Title** of firstborn to the 2nd son.

OK? "Firstborn" is primarily a **TITLE indicating Leadership, Preeminence**. Jesus is called the '*Firstborn of the dead*'¹¹ even though other people *chronologically* died and came alive again before Jesus' resurrection (e.g.; Lazarus).

- "FIRSTBORN OF THE DEAD" = JESUS IS **PREEMINENT** OVER ALL WHO DIE AND COME TO LIFE AGAIN.

¹¹ Colossians 1:18

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CLICK: Now, let's look at the Tribe of Reuben's historical gripe. When Jacob was on his deathbed (Genesis 49), he prophesied over his twelve original sons¹². Jacob split the 1st-born privileges among two sons.

- 1) Spiritual leadership was given to Judah; Jacob skipped over Reuben, Simeon and Levi because of their conduct and made Judah – the 4th son chronologically – the spiritual leader of the family.¹³
- 2) Double portion of financial estate given to Joseph; by virtue of Jacob having adopted Joseph's two sons as his own¹⁴, Jacob effectively gave a double portion of the Promised Land to Joseph.

This didn't sit well with Reuben.

And now, not only is the tribe of Reuben not the leader, but now the leader of the nation is Moses – a *Levite*. *That's just not fair – at least according to Dathan and Abiram*. So, 400 years after Jacob skipped over Reuben, Reuben's descendants are still nursing a grudge.

OK...

¹² He did not prophesize about Ephraim or Manasseh at this time.

¹³ Genesis 49:10

¹⁴ Genesis 48:5-6, Jacob adopts Ephraim and Manasseh as sons, not just his grandsons.

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SLIDE: TO DETERMINE WHO WAS HOLY ENOUGH TO APPROACH GOD, MOSES PROPOSES A "HOLY ENOUGH" TEST

Moses addresses the Priesthood issue first, as it was most important. Now, it had already been made clear – with the death of Aaron's two sons – that approaching the Lord was to be made on **His** terms. Anyone else who attempts it does so at their own mortal risk. But, here we go again...

Moses proposes a "*holy enough*" test to demonstrate whether a **higher level** of holiness is required to approach Yahweh, or can any Israelite do it since they are holy because they are members of the congregation of Israel. Korah and the others are to bring their fire pans (censors) with incense to the Tabernacle the following day and try to offer incense as allowed only by the priests. If they succeed, then they also are holy enough to approach God as the priests do.¹⁵ But, Moses warns Korah and his followers that they are overstepping their authority in attempting to do this. It is only... "The man **the Lord chooses** will be the one who is holy."¹⁶

On the following morning, Korah and 250 important men from the various tribes appear at the Tabernacle with their censors and incense to resolve the "holy enough to offer incense" issue.

¹⁵ They (the 250) would probably appoint Korah as High Priest, which is Korah's primary motive in the whole affair.

¹⁶ Numbers 16:7

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While Korah and the others are at the Tabernacle, Moses then attempts to hash out the second issue – Leadership – with the Tribe of Reuben. He had summoned Dathan and Abiram to the Tabernacle for a discussion, perhaps anticipating that they would back off after witnessing what would happen to Korah and company. But, they **refused** to come, showing that they reject his authority.

- Note an odd expression in verse 14: "Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. **Would you put out the eyes of these men?** We will not come up!"
 - Hebrew expression means - "we won't come up so that you can **pull the wool over their eyes again**".

SLIDE: SHOWDOWN AT THE OK CORRAL

At God's instruction, Moses leaves the 250 men with Aaron at the Tabernacle and walks down into the camp of Reuben (showing no fear) and he confronts Dathan and Abiram at their own tents.

Now, when Moses confronts Dathan and Abiram, it is really **the first time** that he publically defends himself in front of the people. Up to now, he was silent before the people themselves regarding their complaints; he chose to pour out his heart to God and let God handle the situation. **Moses is beginning get really frustrated at the people, and he is**

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beginning to respond personally. He tells God not to listen to any of their prayers because they're unjustly accusing him of personal enrichment **(as if God doesn't know this)**. The continued griping and opposition is beginning to get under his skin, and in a later chapter, Moses will give in to anger – which will cause him not to enter the Promised Land.

Moses arrives at the tent site of Dathan, Abiram and Korah. Evidently the tents of Dathan, Abiram were pitched right up at the boundary where the Levites tented, so all three tent sites were close to each other. While the “holy enough to offer incense” test is still going on back at the Tabernacle, Moses announces a different test for this group. God had told Moses to tell the crowd to **back away** from the vicinity of these tents – and he does so.

- **SLOWLY, THE CROWD BACKS AWAY (IT MUST HAVE BEEN SIMILAR TO THE WAR MOVIES WHERE THE TROOPS BACK AWAY BEFORE THE CAPTURED PRISONERS ARE MACHINED GUNNED TO DEATH.**

Can you imagine the "Oh-Oh" feeling that Dathan and Abiram and their families must have had right now??

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SLIDE: THE EARTH OPENS UP

The earth opens up; Dathan, Abiram and their families fall into the crevasse and die. Scripture says that the hole *closed up* after the people went down.

Scripture also states that "and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions" suffered a similar fate in the camp. While it doesn't say here that Korah died in this earthquake, just the **men** who belonged to him, Numbers 26 says that Korah also was killed in this earth split event – so he must have also been standing at his tent or Dathan's tent and gotten swallowed.

- Korah evidently left the 250 men with their censors at the Tabernacle and followed Moses down into the camp of Reuben.

He may have been trying to show solidarity with Dathan and Abriam, or he may have remembered how Aaron's two eldest sons had been killed when they made some mistake in the tabernacle.

- **Just like modern Demagogues and race-baiters who always seem to be able to avoid being at violent events they have encouraged.**

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SLIDE: INCENSE AND FIRE (progressive)

The scene then switches back to the Tabernacle and **God posts the results of the "holy enough to be priest" test on the Tabernacle wall.**

The 250 men had arrived and were standing there with their fire pans and incense to challenge God's established hierarchy – these were men who were respected and important in the community, men of status, but who had no business trying to come near to God without His permission. They were burned alive by fire coming from God's own presence.

Question: Were all these 250 men grasping at power? Probably not; some of them probably were sincere and want to approach God for well-intentioned reasons. If so, why did God destroy them – why was His reaction so strong??

SLIDE: PATTERN FOR SALVATION

The answer is in the Book of Hebrews as it talks about the eternal priesthood of Christ:

“They (priests) serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle:

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'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'¹⁷

The Tabernacle, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the furniture etc. were a model – **a pattern – of heaven and the coming sacrifice of Christ**. The people would not be allowed to taint that pattern.

- *All God's plans have the mark of the Cross on them, and all His plans have death-to-self in them.*¹⁸

Trying to bring OUR modifications to GOD'S plans will be met with Divine wrath.

It's all about Jesus and the Cross! The whole sacrificial system, with the priesthood, blood atonement and laws, kosher, holy ground, was God's PLAIN REVELATION about the absolute need to accept a coming Messiah who would fulfill all the requirements for us to enter His presence.

As a brief aside: my brothers and sisters, this is why we can never give into the tendency to be flippant and make fun of some of the OT laws and sacrificial system practices that seem so outdated now that Jesus has arrived. And, They ARE outdated. Christ has forever changed the way we approach God.

¹⁷ Hebrews 8:5

¹⁸ E. M. Bounds, <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=33027>

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But at the time, it was God HIMSELF Who commanded these practices to serve a pattern of the Coming Christ.

These practices and ceremonies had a Divine purpose. To ridicule what God commanded back then prior to Christ and the Cross is neither prudent – perhaps it is not even safe.

PRIDE

SLIDE: PRIDE

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life." Proverbs 4:23

OK – that's what happened. What does it mean to us the church today – and how does this relate to Advent?

The root sin behind Korah's rebellion was Pride. Korah, Dathan and company believed that they deserved a higher status in the community and set about to grab it, seeking positions of authority for which God said you needed His stamp of approval. God will oppose anyone who tries to spiritually exalt himself or herself based on their own merits or by having hidden knowledge.

As an aside: Another lesson from the Korah incident – at least to me – is that the most dangerous place in all to world

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to be in – or TRY to be in – is a position of spiritual authority that God hasn't placed you in.

The Brothers' group – You may remember that Owen Carey met with the Brothers' Group – I really dislike that name, sounds elitist, "Motley Crew" would be better – Owen met us about eight times discussing eldership. Jack Oles was chosen – God's choice in my opinion.

Those sessions were great -- but because I attended, some people concluded that I was hoping to become an elder. I repeatedly said that this was **NOT the case**. You see, even a Irish Catholic kid from RI and a Red Sox fan – EVEN I am smart enough NOT to try for a position of spiritual authority unless I am convinced that it is God's mandate for me. However, to be truthful, not everyone believed me, perhaps thinking it was false humility on my part. And that was disappointing, but perhaps understandable because the desire for more recognition, praise, and status is a human characteristic.

OK – everyone here knows that Pride is theoretically wrong. **I don't even have to tell that to Yankee fans this year.** So, why not just end the message right here? Because I don't believe in coincidences. This presentation on the Rebellion of Korah has been rescheduled several times since it first went on the calendar, and we're here today on the 1st Sunday in Advent

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– looking forward to the humble birth of the Messiah. And because God is Sovereign, I believe that perhaps we need to hear something regarding the issue of pride and humility today...

- BECAUSE IT WAS MAN'S PRIDE THAT MADE CHRIST'S ACTS OF HUMILITY NECESSARY.

Do I think that we have an issue with Pride here in CCC?

SLIDE : Yes I do – I hate to say it, but I'm convinced that there are two groups of people here who have a serious problem with pride:

- # 1. All of you, and...
- # 2. Me.

The Bible clearly says that we all do – all men and women have an issue with pride.

Pride is different from the other moral sins in that it is the one sin of which *no man or woman in the world is free*. It is a vice that everyone in the world hates when we see it in someone else. **Ignorance of our own pride seems to be a part of human nature.** Ironically, even if we realize that we have a problem with pride or anger or whatever, we have a way of downplaying or excusing it – *"nobody's perfect, right* – or even

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BRAGGING about our emotions – say our temper – bragging about it as if it is a prideful badge of HONOR – like a Boy Scout merit badge for shoveling horse pockey.

- **Pride in a Christian takes us further away from conforming to the image of Christ.**

You know, in a way, Pride is one of the easiest topics to present. Why – because it's a message we all can comfortably sit through as we believe certain other people who are here – or who should be here – need to hear such a message. We think – "Yeh – preach it, give it to them", as we casually sneak a peek in their direction to see if they have a reaction.

People having pride issues often believe the message is for someone else. And, **unless the Holy Spirit intervenes, the message gets treated as someone else's email.**

PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR

Lucifer's downfall was pride, Adam's downfall was pride. Pride – self-importance – It is a very enticing trap and is used by Satan very effectively on Christians – and oftentimes without our realization. Let me show you how diabolically sly Satan can be when tempting us to pride:

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We've all heard of that parable in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus talks about the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple.

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:
¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

The Pharisee prayed: "I thank Thee of God that I am not like this man..." Jesus says that the humble tax collector was justified, not this prideful religious leader.

OK – we can readily agree with Jesus' assessment. But, here's the diabolical whisper in our ear: – *do we find ourselves thinking:* "I thank thee, Oh God, that I am not like that Pharisee?"

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Tricky, diabolically so. How often do we catch ourselves as we are about to reach for the fruit of pride that Adam ate? Not often enough, as I can personally testify.

LET ME give you a PERSONAL EXAMPLE of how insidious pride can be: earlier presentations of Numbers, people came up to me and said that the presentations were great. I honestly did not feel prideful when people said the material as good. And then I thought about it – that I DIDN'T feel prideful and said to myself, ISN'T THAT GREAT! I don't feel prideful about the complements. And I began to feel pride that I didn't feel prideful at the complements.

- **Prideful that I didn't feel prideful... how's that for self-deception?**

Satan has had over 5,000 years of practice on mankind, and we're no match for him *alone*.

Have you noticed that many large Christian churches and ministries wither after a generation? They become proud, their leadership becomes self-righteous and believes that they alone hear God clearly, the message becomes gimmicky and THEN eventually becomes either complacent or often dictatorial and abusive.

Q: Was the continued wealth and popularity after they began to stray from the Gospel message – was that continued

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success that nurtured their pride – was it from God or from Satan?

Successful ministries are not necessarily Godly ministries. And, I can tell you that being up here delivering a message is especially vulnerable to pride. John Stott, an Anglican clergyman, wrote:

"Truth to tell, the pulpit is a perilous place for any child of Adam to occupy. It is 'high and lifted up', and thus enjoys a prominence which should be restricted to Yahweh's throne. (Isa. 6:1) We stand there in solitude, (then pose and expound) while the eyes of all sit still, silent and subdued – (like gentle lambs listening to their master). Who can endure such public exposure and remain unscathed by vanity? Pride is without doubt the chief occupational hazard of the preacher. It has ruined many, and deprived their ministry of power."¹⁹

Charles Spurgeon once quoted John Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress*): Bunyan, after he had done preaching (pulpit up high w/circular staircase), went to the back of the church and a Brother came to him and said, "You have preached an admirable sermon." "Ah," said Bunyan, "you are too late! **The devil told me that before I got down the pulpit stairs.**"²⁰

¹⁹ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds, The Challenge of Preaching*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982, page 320

²⁰ Sermon # 2591, Pride the Destroyer, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons44.xlii.html>

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Pride, I am afraid, is part of our sinful nature. (Baptism – dying to self) And it's so ironic, because if we sit on the HIGHEST THRONE IN THE WORLD, WE STILL SIT ON OUR OWN BOTTOM.”

C.S. Lewis wrote: *"If you want to find out how proud you are*, the easiest way is to ask yourself, 'How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?'

We are all sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. Succumbing to pride is as natural to us as breathing – sometimes breathing is conscious, most times is not. And like breathing, we can hold our pride in for only a short time before we gasp for air – and – sadly – it feels so good when it comes in.

Humility

How do we combat pride? Humility. And don't look to me as the example – I'm just learning baby steps right now. But, I do know that the first step in acquiring humility is to realize that you are proud. Until you realize this, nothing can be done about it. “If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”

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So – what do WE do about cultivating humility, that He would increase while I would decrease. Well – I myself trying to remember a quote of CS Lewis:

SLIDE: CS LEWIS QUOTE

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less (often).”

Humility is not thinking that others are more Godly or more kind than you, or more intelligent, nicer, better at cooking, or better at cricket than you. They may be. They may not be. Humility is when you consider other people’s interests before your own. Thinking what is best for the other person and acting on that. We’re being humble when we think of others before ourselves. You may have a greater status than someone. You may have authority over someone. You don’t pretend you don’t have authority over them. But you think what will benefit the people under you. What do they need? What is best for them? **“Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less often.”**

My dad was the best example I know of regarding humility. Worked hard, but every Sunday, took my mom, my grandmother Theresa, his mother Mary and occasionally an elderly aunt Kate for a 2-hour ride to get them out of the

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house (none of them drove). Until I was 12, I had to come also for the ride also – and let me tell you, those 4 women together were nothing like the crew of the Love Boat. **But, he put them before himself.**

He was Master Sergeant in Marine Corps in WWI. Loved it, wanted to stay in but enlisted man's quarters was no place to raise a child – **so he gave it up and was discharged.**

Baseball – he could have been pro; impressed Pittsburgh scout when catching my cousin Joe Trimble in a try-out. Joe had great fastball but sometimes wild, and he asked dad to catch so that he would look more accurate. Pittsburgh Scout hired my cousin (also played for Red Sox), and was interested in dad – until he found out he was 40 years old then.

He impressed professional baseball scout at the age of 40 *and catching wasn't his position – he had been an all-state center fielder!* Dad considered a baseball career up after he got out of Marines after he got out of the Marines because minor-league pay couldn't support family.

➤ He thought of my mom and me before himself.

I have had many misconceptions about humility. Humility is not the same as beating yourself up or letting other people put you down. Humility is not the same as low self-esteem and it's not the opposite of confidence. Actually, the true humble

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person walks with absolute confidence, knowing that they are simply empty vessels that God will fill and thus use them to accomplish His work. That's why Moses could right that he was the most humble man on earth. It's not about us. It's about Jesus. That is a truly freeing realization.

SLIDE: ADVENT

So – We're on the 1st Sunday of Advent. Think of it – the God of the Universe humbling Himself to dwell within a man-made structure – a lowly manger at that. Remember – At Advent, we have Jesus being born in a stable. Why? Well, the factual answer was that there was no room at the Inn. And why not? Because evidently God did not want room to be available at the Inn.

Think about it – Almighty God could have arranged it for Jesus to be born anyplace – in a palace or an inn. Many people tend to focus on the Inns being full. But, God, if He had wanted, certainly could have made a room open at the Inn, regardless of how many people were in Bethlehem. Or, Jesus could have been born in a palace under Herod's nose if God wanted.

I suggest that perhaps the humble stable with animals that were sinless was actually one of the cleanest place on the whole earth for our Savior to be born. Just like the floor of the

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Tabernacle was a holy place when sinless animals came to be offered...

Jesus be born on ground that was holy because of His presence and surrounded by sinless animals. Humility – God made the first move and so Jesus was born in a lowly stable. And as we know...

SLIDE: JESUS' HUMILITY DIDN'T END AT HIS BIRTHPLACE – IT CONTINUED ON TO OUR BIRTHPLACE – THE CROSS

Philippians 2:

“ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being born as a human being.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

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¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

John Stott wrote:

“Every time we look at the cross, Christ seems to be saying to us, “I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.” NOTHING IN HISTORY OR IN THE UNIVERSE CUTS US DOWN TO SIZE LIKE THE CROSS. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size.”²¹

“When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss”

And pour contempt on all my pride

**The Blood of Jesus deals with what we have done - the
Cross deals with who we are.**

²¹ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, InterVarsity Press, 1968, page 179

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John 6:44 – "NO ONE **CAN** come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

No one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him. If He didn't draw me, I couldn't come. **Not I *wouldn't* come, I *couldn't* come.** This humbles me. The stance of a humble Christian – I get nothing good except by grace! I came to Him by Grace. I'm in Him by Grace. I'm kept by Grace. I'll be raised from the dead by Grace. If I do anything worthwhile in life, it's because of Grace.

"In the darkest night of our soul, we have something to **hold on to that Job never knew. We know Christ crucified.** Christians have learned that when there seems to be no other evidence of God's love, they cannot escape the cross."²²

Finally – Psalm 42.

SLIDE: PSALM 42

As the hart pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants after thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears

²² D. A. Carson quoted by C.J. Mahaney in 'Humility: True Greatness'

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have been my bread day and night, while they say to me all day where is thy God? (Psalm 42)

*To the chief musician, an instruction, for the sons of Korach:
Written by the sons of Korah...*

Yes – the descendents of the sons of the same Korah of Numbers chapter 16 wrote Psalm 42 hundreds of years later. Apparently, **the sons** of Korach did not follow their father, nor his teachings. They continued to carry the Ark with dignity. **Think of that** – Having your father considered a prideful enemy of God must have been a tremendously humbling thing, but they looked ahead, not behind.

THE PROPHET SAMUEL arose from the line of Korah, the genealogy of which is recorded in [1 Chronicles 6:31–38](#). And, during the time of King David, they became the great leaders in choral and orchestral music in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

- Here are some of their lyrics:
- **SLIDE (progressive)**
 - “How lovely is your dwelling place, O God.” Psalm 84:1
 - “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble..” Psalm 46:1-3

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- " 'Be still, and know that I am Adonai; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth' " Psalm 46
- "Great *is* the Lord, and greatly to be praised - In the city of our God, *In* His holy mountain. Beautiful in situation, The joy of the whole earth, *Is* Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north, The city of the great King." Psalm 48
- "For a day in Your courts *is* better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness." Psalm 48

Think your history or your family's history is so rotten that you must be hateful to God also? The Sons of Korah are a living testimony to God's grace. They sided with Adonai, even against their earthly father – they rather be humble doorkeepers in God's house than live in the tents of the wicked..

***** In a sense, the Sons of Korah CAME TO THE MANGER – and WE can too, AGAIN THIS YEAR. IT TAKES THE HUMILITY OF A CHILD.**

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SLIDE: *“God created the world out of nothing, and as long as we are nothing, He can make something out of us.”*

Martin Luther

As long as we admit that we are creatures under His authority, God can do great things through us – like He did with the Sons of Korah.

SLIDE: Find Christ all over again this Christmas season like you did as a child – it's all about Jesus!

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray

Amen.