

## Parasha Korach

ויקח קרח בן-יצהר בן-קהת בן-לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן-פלת בני ראובן:  
ויקמו לפני משה ואנשים מבני-ישראל חמשים ומאתים נשיאי עדה קראי מועד אנשי-שם:

In this week's Parasha, Korach (a Levite) challenges the leadership of Moshe and the Aaronic priesthood. Joining Korach's rebellion against Moshe are Dathan and Aviram (from the tribe of Reuben), as well as 250 key council members who defy Moshe and Aharon, stating, *"You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and Adonai is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above Adonai's assembly?"* (Numbers 16:3) This week we read the special haftorah for when Shabbat coincides with Rosh Chodesh, in which God begins by saying: *"The heavens are My throne, and the earth is My footstool."* In this final chapter of Isaiah, heaven and earth are used as metaphors. What is the meaning of this metaphor? "Heaven" is the Torah, God's wisdom, which is infinite. No matter how much you learn it and how well you grasp it, there is always more to learn and higher to strive. It is compared to a throne because when a king sits on his throne, he is lowered and closer to the earth. The Torah is Godliness being drawn down through our study. "Earth" is the mitzvahs, which are done with physical, earthly objects. When it comes to doing mitzvahs, we are all equals. No matter our intellectual abilities, we do them the same. It is compared to a footstool, which raises the king's feet off the earth. When you do a mitzvah and use a physical object for a holy purpose, in effect, you are raising its status, infusing it with holiness and bringing it closer to God. This is the key to serving Yeshua, and this is our purpose: to draw Godliness down into the physical through the study of Torah and by uplifting the world to God through the performance of mitzvahs. When our work is done, the world will be so open to Godliness that His presence will fill the world, and we will experience His glory in the physical. This is what the coming of Mashiach is all about. The whole world will see and feel God's presence, and they will recognize Him as the one and only true God, and that we are His treasure. This will cause all the joy and happiness the continuation of the haftorah talks about. The people of the world will bring their Jews "as a gift to God... with joyous songs... to Jerusalem."

This is also the connection to Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. Like Torah, Shabbat is from above; God decided when Shabbat is, and we draw down its holiness according to our ability. On the other hand, Rosh Chodesh is sanctified by us, through the Sanhedrin, who determined when to declare a new month. We uplift the day into a state of holiness, bringing it up to God. The haftorah then tells us that God will make a "new heaven and a new earth." What are these about? This refers to new levels of closeness to God that will be achievable. Not that we will be far in any way. Rather, God being infinite, there are always deeper levels of closeness to achieve, even for a person who has reached the level of *"Heavens are My throne, and the earth is My footstool."*

Meaning, even those who have been doing Torah and mitzvahs at the highest level will find a new level to achieve. The old level will pale in comparison to the new one. Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh will also be new, as the haftorah says: *"Every new moon and every Shabbat all flesh will come to prostrate before Me, says God."* This is something that wasn't done during the First and Second Temple eras, but when Mashiach comes, we will go up to a new Holy Temple every Rosh Chodesh and every Shabbat. New heaven, new earth, new Shabbat, new Rosh Chodesh and a new Holy Temple. May it happen soon and in our days. Anyway, let's move into the crux of the teaching...

In college, when I was studying psychology, one of the books I reviewed (cliff notes) was titled "Why Men Rebel". In it the author, Ted Robert Gurr, tries to explain why riots, rebellions, and civil wars occur. He cites statistics of nations that have tried to overthrow their governments, usually through violent means. He makes lots of interesting observations, but I am particularly intrigued by his claim that the primary cause of rebellion is discontent. He says that discontent arises from a feeling that people are being deprived of something they expect or feel they are entitled to. As a simple example, let's say that fast-food flippers at Burger King get \$1 more than fast-food flippers at McDonalds. When McDonalds workers find out, they say *"we are doing the same kind of work; we ought to get the same pay."* They become discontented because of that difference in pay. And it is that discrepancy between what people in a society have and what they think they deserve that drives the feeling of discontent. Gurr calls it relative deprivation. He used a graph to explain what he meant. The line of what people have remains flat while the line representing what people want goes up. And you can substitute whatever you want on that graph: wages, health benefits, working conditions, education, or whatever.

We could probably use that theory to explain the discontent of the people of Israel in the book of Numbers. In chapters 20 and 21 (next week's parasha) They ran out of food. They didn't have any meat. They experienced hardship. In Parasha Korach, there's a challenge to the leadership of Moshe and Aaron, and our Parasha tells that story. The great, overriding question of the story is why of all times does Korach's rebellion happen right now? And why does it have to happen at all? What exactly is Korach's issue with Moshe and Aharon? Well, there's Korach's overt words. The entire nation is holy, why do you lord yourself over them like this? Now if I had to summarize that argument to you, I could do it in one word, communism. We're all equal, we're all holy, we don't need any leaders. Evidently Moshe heard something in Korach's words that was a little deeper than what Korach said overtly. Overtly it's there shouldn't be any leader, covertly it's *"maybe I should be the leader?"* It's like George Orwell back in Animal Farm: *"All animals are created equal, but some animals are more equal than others"*. Communism is the veneer; power is the goal. Gurr's theory of relative deprivation helps to explain some things about conditions in our world. It is an interesting theory but doesn't go far enough. It does not fully explain what was going on with the people of Israel. And it doesn't account for the cross of Yeshua.

The Bible records several stories about the complaints of these people. In our passage for today, we learn that Korach and his cronies quarreled with Moshe. Moshe lashed back at them. When we read Psalm 78, we can see there was a lot going on. It was not just discontent, mistrust, or impatience. It was called rebellion. Interspersed between statements about God's promises, gifts and provisions in this Psalm, we read words such as these: V.17 Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High. V.40 How often they rebelled against him in the desert. V.56 Yet they tested the Most High God and rebelled against him. God had a wonderful plan for His people, but they didn't listen. He mapped out the road for them, but they didn't go. Instead, they rebelled. They went after their own solutions. Again and again in the Bible we read about God's provisions on the one hand and their rebellion against God on the other. Isaiah 30:1 calls them "*rebellious children*" because they tried to make themselves politically and militarily strong by making an alliance with Egypt rather than depending upon God. Jeremiah realized his own position before God when he wrote in *Lamentations 1:18*, "*The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word.*" In his prayer of confession, Daniel said "*we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled.*" (9:5) Just as the people then were impatient with God and just as they spoke against God and rebelled against God, so we have turned away from God to our own way. There is not a one of us who hasn't rebelled against God. I don't mean that just in a general way: "*I'm bad. You're bad. We're all bad.*" Think about it for yourself. When have you been impatient with God? When have you complained that what God was doing was not enough? When have you chosen to take your own path rather than follow God's directions? When have you made a choice for evil rather than for good? *James 4:17* says, "*Therefore whoever knows the right thing to do and does not do it—for him it is sin.*" And sin against God is rebellion, pure and simple.

If we look ahead from our story in Numbers 21, we see that as a result of their rebellion "*God sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many of them died.*" If there is anything we should have learned in our journey through the Bible, it is that God is a holy, righteous God. He takes sin seriously and He longs for His people to be holy and righteous. And sometimes He takes severe steps to remind them. There is not one of you parents here who, when your child disobeys, has not had to take measures of some kind to let the child know that you want him to live up to the standard you have set. And when that child disobeys you may require time out, you may take away a privilege, or you may punish in some other way. And you hope the child learns there are consequences to disobedience. The Bible says there are consequences to rebellion against God. And because of our rebellion against God, we deserve punishment worse than these serpents. We deserve death. When Charles Spurgeon preached on this passage in 1859, he said, "*Even though no officer has arrested you, though death has not laid his cold hand upon you, yet Scripture says, 'Those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.'*"

*The black cap is on the judge's head. You are standing under the gallows, with the rope on your neck, and you have but to be cast off from the ladder by the hand of death, and you are swinging in eternity lost and ruined. You are condemned already. Take that home, man. Your sentence is signed in heaven and sealed and stamped, and the only reason it is not carried out is because God in mercy respites you.*" We wouldn't use those words today, but the guilt you feel when you do something wrong tells you that things are not right. You have violated one of God's laws and you deserve punishment. In Numbers 21 we see that when the people realized what they had done, they came to Moshe and admitted their sin. *"We have sinned by speaking against Adonai and against you,"* they said. When Peter preached his first sermon after Yeshua left, He reminded His listeners that they had been responsible for the death of Yeshua. The Bible says they were cut to the heart, and they asked what they should do. *"Repent and baptized in the name of Yeshua haMashiach so that your sins may be forgiven,"* he told them. Remember that repentance is more than just saying you are sorry. Repentance means that you change your behavior. There is the story of the woman who was accused of exaggerating. And she said, "Oh, I know it is a bad habit and I feel so guilty. I have shed barrels of tears over it." Repentance is changing your ways, turning your face towards God because you want to do His will.

If that were the end of the story, we would still be in miserable circumstances. We are not able to pull ourselves out of our miserable condition. In this story, we see first that Moshe prayed for the people. Count yourself fortunate if you have someone who prays for you. Never discount the power of prayer. And if you are hearing God speak to you this afternoon, know that someone's prayers have ascended to heaven on your behalf. But most important for the circumstances of these people was the remedy God provided. God told Moshe to *"make a poisonous serpent and set it on a pole and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."* They could be saved from their rebellion, their guilt and death. "Look and live," he says. Oh, the serpents are still there. He hasn't taken them away, but the serpents won't have any power if the people put their faith in God. Salvation was available only through faith – not in the bronze serpent on the pole, not in Moshe, but in God. The serpent on the pole was a symbol of God's word, God's help. Many years later God's Son was lifted up on a cross. John 3:14-15 says, *"Just as Moshe lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."* God gave up his son to heal our rebellion and take away our sin. You may recognize the fruit of rebellion in your own soul today. And you are ready to repent, to say with the people of Israel "I have sinned." Lift up your eyes to the one who can save you. If you have never opened your life to Yeshua or you know you are not in His will, you are in rebellion. You need to make your peace with God. He wants to set you free from fear. He wants to give you real freedom.

Has anyone here ever heard of Diego Rivera? No, not Geraldo Rivera from TV... Diego Rivera. Diego Rivera was a famous mural painter from Mexico at the beginning part of the 20th century. Rivera painted a handful of very famous murals depicting Mexico's history. In these murals he would place important historical figures from different time periods literally side by side in one big panorama. The book of Isaiah is like one of Diego Rivera's murals. God, speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, gives us a panoramic view of history and the future – of time as we know it. He paints in broad strokes from the perspective of eternity. You see, God lives outside of time. For him it's as if the future has already happened. So, in the book of Isaiah, he places future events side by side. He speaks of the future as if it has already happened. For example, he describes in detail the suffering and death of Yeshua 700 years before his birth, and he tells it as if it had already happened! Well, our haftarah is comprised of the last written words of the Prophet Isaiah. In our text we have a mural – a mural which depicts man's journey to eternity. In this mural there are only two roads on which to travel. Today we're going to look at those two roads: the road that leads to eternal destruction in Hell and the road which leads to eternal life in Heaven. We read from Isaiah 66:18-24... The road which leads to the eternal destruction of Hell. Heaven and Hell exist. I feel I must say that, because our post-modern society isn't quite sure. Well, that is, at least about the Hell part. Recently, I went on the internet and checked out some surveys to see what Americans believe about Heaven and Hell. Now, I can't say whether these surveys are completely accurate, but the results are definitely interesting. It seems that 93% of Americans believe that heaven exists, but less than 60% believe that hell exists. Less than 10% think that they are going there. Only 27% even believe that Satan is real – So, I guess the old saying is true: "The greatest feat Satan ever accomplished was convincing the world that he didn't exist." – 45% of Americans think that it really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe something. 44% believe that good atheists will get to go to heaven. And I guess none of this is surprising seeing that only 41%, well under half of all Americans, believe that the Bible is totally accurate. So, if I don't like to hear what the Bible says about Hell, punishment, and sin... I'll just believe them away. But God's Word is totally accurate. God's Word does speak of Hell, of eternal death, and of the punishment of sin. In fact, Isaiah paints a very vivid picture of Hell here in our text.

In verses 22 and 23 he pictures heaven like the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Temple where believers will worship God forever. In verse 24, Isaiah says that outside of the temple are the dead bodies of those who rebelled against him, and that *"their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."* This is word picture that the Jews of Isaiah's day would be able to see very clearly. You see, just outside of Jerusalem a short distance from the Temple is the Hinnom Valley. The Brit Chadasha uses the Hinnom Valley as an illustration for Hell and for good reason. Since in the days of Tanakh, the Hinnom Valley was a place of wailing and groaning. It was there that pagans slaughtered and burned their own children as sacrifices to the god Moloch.

For centuries it served as the dump of Jerusalem where garbage and carcasses were burned. It was a place of filth and disgust for those who lived in Jerusalem. And Isaiah says that that is what Hell will be, an eternal fire, worms eating away at your flesh forever. A place outside of God's Kingdom. Thrown out of his perfect presence into eternal punishment. An eternity in the filthiest, most painful and most disgusting place imaginable. As Yeshua said, *"where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* And what is the road that leads to Hell? Well, basically it's the road that we all start out on. In verse 18, God says that because of man's actions and imaginations, He would come to gather them together to see His glory. Now remember, for sinful mankind to see God's glory is not necessarily a good thing. He is talking here of his glorious and awesome judgement. It's time to pay for rebellion against His commands. And to those who think, *"Well I don't need to be afraid of God's judgement. I'm not such a bad person. I haven't killed anyone. I've been a good husband or wife, father or mother."* Well, God says that it is not only for their actions, but also for their thoughts... their imaginations. Those of you who have read the Sermon on the Mount, I'm sure have seen that angry, hateful thoughts are murder in God's eyes. Lustful thoughts are adultery. We all are murderers and adulterers. "Good atheists" are still murderers. Well-intentioned, moral people are still adulterers. All have rebelled against God and deserve His punishment. A punishment which millions of people from every generation will suffer. Hell is very real. All people deserve to go there. We may not like to hear about it. Our world tells us to go to churches that tell us "I'm OK. You're OK. All people are basically good. All people except the worst of the worst will go to heaven." The Bible doesn't say that. In fact, the Bible is very clear. *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* And *"The wages of sin is death."*

Next, let's talk about the road to eternal life. The amazing thing is that God is not only a just God who must punish sin, He is also a God of love who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Isaiah here tells us in verse 19 that God will "set a sign among them". The original Hebrew literally has the idea of doing a wondrous, amazing thing among them. And what was that wondrous thing that God did among us? He manifested in Yeshua as the Narrow door that leads to heaven. Yeshua is the road that leads to heaven. The way, the truth and the life. We see in verse 19 that there would be survivors, those who are saved from God's just punishment. And we know well how that came about. God punished Yeshua for the sins of all mankind. There is now no punishment for those who believe in Him. And we see that out of those first "survivors", i.e., out those first Jewish believers many would go out to the ends of the earth to bring people from every nation, tribe and tongue into God's family. And that's just what happened 800 years after Isaiah died. The disciples, a small number of Jewish believers, went out and spread that Gospel all over the world. We can see here in our congregation the fulfillment of this prophecy. People from all over the world who speak different languages have been brought into the family of God. And we now have the privilege to share that, Gospel.

Isaiah even tells us that the Gentiles will actually bring back some of his Jewish brothers into God's family. Every time we share God's Word with someone and bring them into God's family, to the Holy Mountain of Jerusalem (which is a figurative way of saying, "God's Holy Fellowship"), we are presenting to God a holy and perfect offering of thanksgiving. Just like the offerings that the Israelites used to bring to God in their ceremonially clean vessels. You see, all those who believe can present themselves to God as perfect and holy, ceremonially clean, because we have been washed in Yeshua's blood. In fact, we are now priests in service to God as verse 21 says. The Apostle Peter writes that we, even though we are not Israelites physically, through faith we have become *"a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light."* We are God's chosen people. We are priests. In heaven we will be in God's holy temple. We will see Him face to face. We will praise Him from "New Moon to New Moon, from Shabbat to Shabbat", that is, we will worship continually forever. All because of Yeshua. He is the narrow door. He is the road to heaven. There is no other. There's an old saying: "All roads lead to Rome." Well, not all roads lead to heaven. It is not enough just to believe that there is a god. Those who say that there is only one god and that the different religions of the world only worship him in different ways are wrong! There is only one God, the God of Israel and all others are but useless idols of stone and wood. If a person doesn't believe in Yeshua, he is on the road to Hell. Being a good person. Trying hard. Being spiritual. Even though they sound good, without Yeshua they are all different roads leading to the same place: hell, and that's no place to be destined for. There is only one way to heaven, through faith in Yeshua. What a wonderful and amazing thing it is that we are on that road. What a gracious God we have!

A poem of all time is a well-known poem written by Robert Frost called "The Road Not Taken". In it, Frost describes how one day he was walking in the woods and came to a fork in the road. The first road was more highly traveled. It seemed like the easier way to go. The other was overgrown and narrow. Very few people had traveled down it. The poem ends in this way: *Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.*

The world presents us with many roads, all of which eventually lead to Hell. God has called us and saves us through the blood of Yeshua, our Messiah. He has placed us on the road less traveled. We are going through the "Narrow Door" to Heaven, to Yeshua. So, let us abandon any spirit of rebellion and stay on the path to righteousness in Yeshua.

b'Shem Yeshua, haMelech v'haMashiach Shelanu! Amein.  
*("in the name of Yeshua, our King and the Messiah! Amein.")*