

a parable of the Kingdom: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins" (v. 1). Some virgins had prepared for the wedding, some had not. The day arrived; at midnight the cry was made: "and they that were ready went in with him [the bridegroom] to the marriage: and *the door was shut*". Noah and his family had prepared themselves and were ready for the day of judgement, and the time of the wedding. The prepared ones entered into the wedding ark, "and the LORD *shut [them] in*" (Gen. 7:16). In picture we have the wedding feast taking place in the ark while the judgements were taking place outside, and the time of rest was about to be ushered in and the covenant established.

There is also a warning: "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Mt. 25:11,12). Some of the

household will be rejected for lack of preparation. It will be too late, the door will be shut. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (v. 13).

Summary

Our generation, surely, is the generation Christ referred to, the generation that is like Noah's generation. With relief we read, "And the ark rested" (Gen. 8:4). The ecclesial ark is soon to rest in the Land of Promise: "For we which have believed do enter into rest". "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest", because "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Heb. 4:3,11,9). All flesh died, but Noah was saved with his household. Let us follow the example of this giant of faith, that the inheritance in the Promised Land may be ours, and we may rest with him in the future Sabbath.

Moses: earth's meekest man

28. Fatal jealousy*

John Mitchell

Following the Israelites' faithless refusal to go up to the Land, there was a serious challenge to the Divinely given authority of Moses and Aaron, a challenge that resulted in them being dramatically vindicated by judgement from God on the rebels.

JEALOUSY is often the force behind men's lust for power and their desire to have the pre-eminence. And such seems to have been the case in the most significant rebellion in the whole of the wilderness journey. Though levelled against Moses and Aaron, however, it was really against God and His ordinances. The rebellion was sparked by a member of the tribe of Levi named Korah, a near relative of Aaron and Moses, backed by three Reubenites named Dathan, Abiram and On. On, however, appears to have dropped out of the conspiracy early, for he is not heard of again.

The prime movers

The three prime movers spread disaffection among the leaders of the tribes by alleging that Moses and Aaron were themselves guilty of selfish

ambition and greed in their respective offices, Moses as leader and Aaron as high priest. In Korah's case there is the suspicion that his jealousy had a family origin. He belonged to one of the three clans of the Levites who had physical charge of the tabernacle

and helped the priests in its services. His clan were the Kohathites, to whom were committed the especial care of all the items relating to the sanctuary, including the ark, the table of shewbread, the lampstand, the altars, the articles used in ministering, the curtains, and everything else relating to their use.

But within the clan there were four families with a hierarchy of their own. The Izharites, to whom Korah belonged, had been subordinated to a younger branch, the Uzzielites (Num. 3:27,30), and this, it is suggested, had given rise to resentment, and a feeling by Korah that his family had been hard done by.

* The narrative in this article is based closely on that of Numbers 16 and 17 in the NIV.

Also, as regards the Reubenite ringleaders, Dathan and Abiram, their grievance was that, as the founder of their tribe was the first-born in Israel, they were entitled to the leadership, not Levi in the person of Moses. Furthermore, on what might be called democratic or egalitarian principles, the disaffection had rippled to 250 community leaders from the other tribes, on the grounds that they all had equal rights to the priesthood and the choice of leader. "They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD'S assembly?'"

Now it may have been called "The LORD'S assembly", but God was certainly not in it. The movement was what is now called humanitarian, or democratic, which describes itself as "government of the people, by the people, for the people", without reference to God. In such a system all men are deemed equal, although, in George Orwell's memorable phrase, some may be more equal than others! The nation of Israel was not, nor was it ever meant to be, a democracy. It was to be a theocracy, designed and regulated by the Lord God Almighty with the intention of bringing to birth a people who would give glory and honour to His holy Name and eventually fill the earth with His righteousness.

The rebellious people who confronted Moses and Aaron were, contrary to their claim, anything but holy, for the Lord was not anywhere in their thoughts. They totally misunderstood the plan and purpose of God in setting up the tabernacle, in which His ordained priests, headed by Aaron, served according to a Law that was "just, and good" (Rom. 7:12) and pointed forward to the taking away of the sin of the world (Jno. 1:29) by a perfect sacrifice of God's providing.

Moses' reaction

Moses' reaction to the community leaders' allegations was one of horror. He fell on his face before the rebels to show his abhorrence of their actions and their claims. Divinely inspired, he immediately called them to account before the God Who they claimed was with them. "He said to Korah and all his followers: 'In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to Him and who is holy, and He will make that person come near Him. The man He chooses He will cause to come near Him. You, Korah, and all your followers are to do this: Take censers and tomorrow put fire and

incense in them before the LORD. The man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!'"

Moses continued: "Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near Himself to do the work at the LORD'S tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near Himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"

Turning then to the matter of Dathan and Abiram, he summoned them to appear before him. "But they said, 'We will not come! Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!' Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, 'Do not accept their offering'"

It was the offering of liars in relation to the course of events that had overtaken the children of Israel, and untrue concerning Moses' integrity. "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them", he said, "nor have I wronged any of them". He and Aaron had to be vindicated at the hand of God, and the perfidy of the rebels made clear before all the people.

Judgement on the rebels

So Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow—you and they and Aaron. Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it—250 censers in all—and present it before the LORD. You and Aaron are to present your censers also".

On the morrow they did as they were bidden and assembled with their censers at the tent of meeting, whereupon the glory of the Lord appeared to the entire congregation, who were sympathetic to the rebels. "Separate yourselves from this assembly", said the Lord to Moses and Aaron, "so that I can put an end to them at once". But Moses and Aaron prostrated themselves before the Lord and cried out, "O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man [that is, Korah] sins?". At which the threat was

removed, and the judgement with it, to the tents of the Reubenites, where Dathan and Abiram and all their families still stood sullenly at their doors.

“Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram . . . Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins”, was the Divine command through Moses. “Then Moses said, “This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt”.

Could there have been a more pregnant moment in all the journeyings of the children of Israel than this? For Moses had no sooner finished speaking than the ground under Dathan and Abiram split open and swallowed them up with all their households, and all Korah’s men and all their possessions descended alive into the grave as it closed in upon them. In a moment they were as though they had not been; dust to dust in a few seconds of time. No wonder at their shouts of terror all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, “The earth is going to swallow us too!”.

Nor did the 250 rebellious leaders, with their censers still in their hands before the tent of meeting, escape the wrath of God, for He sent fire from heaven to consume them even as they were making their offerings before Him. Their ashes were scattered abroad at the Lord’s command, but the censers themselves, having become holy by the presentation, were hammered into sheets to overlay the altar as a perpetual reminder of the people’s sin, and that, on pain of death, no-one not descended from Aaron should ever come to burn incense before the Lord.

Moses and Aaron vindicated

After such a dramatic and shattering display of support for Moses and Aaron and all that they stood for, one would have expected the people to be cowed as never before. Not a bit of it! The very next day the whole community grumbled against them, saying, “You have killed the LORD’S people”, and they gathered towards them menac-

ingly at the tent of meeting. But even as they did so, the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared. “Get away from this assembly so that I can put an end to them at once”, said the Lord to Moses, as he and Aaron fell face down. It was a similar scenario to what had happened before, when Moses had to act in order to save his people despite what they had done to him. Quickly he told Aaron, “Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started”.

Censer in hand, with incense ascending, Aaron, typical of the greater High Priest to come, stood between the living and the dead, but not before another 14,700 people had died of the plague. Then he returned to Moses at the tent of meeting, knowing that the plague had stopped.

It had been a crisis in the history of God’s relationship with His people never to be forgotten or repeated. To drive the lesson home God told Moses to get twelve staves from the individual leaders of their respective tribes, and write the name of each man on his staff, with Aaron’s name on the staff of Levi. “Place them in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Testimony, where I meet with you”, said the Lord. “The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid Myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites”. Accordingly, the tribal leaders each gave Moses a staff, with Aaron’s among them, and Moses placed them before the Lord in the tent of the testimony.

But when Moses entered the tent on the next day he saw that Aaron’s staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. Then Moses brought out all the staves from the Lord’s presence to show them to Israel, who saw them unchanged as each leader identified his own. As for Aaron’s staff that had budded, the Lord told Moses to put it back in front of the testimony, to be stored as a sign to the rebellious. “This will put an end to their grumbling against Me”, He said.

Then, fearful lest the miracle should be the prelude to further judgement upon them, the people panicked and said to Moses, “We shall die! We are lost, we are lost! Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD will die. Are we all going to die?”. To which, it appears, there was neither sequel nor answer.

[\(To be continued\)](#)