

7. Challenging God's authority

January 5, 2012

The Kamikaze which means "Divine wind" in Japanese were suicide attacks by Japanese military pilots against Allied naval ships in the closing stages of the Pacific campaign of World War II. It was designed to destroy as many warships as possible. These attacks, which began in October 1944, followed several critical military defeats for the Japanese. They had long lost aerial dominance due to outdated aircraft and the loss of experienced pilots.

In addition to that, Japan experienced a decreasing economic situation to wage war, and a rapidly declining industrial capacity in comparison with the United States.

In response to the Kamikaze attacks, the Allied naval force developed a defensive strategy called the "big blue blanket" and shot down the majority of Kamikaze planes before they came near their aircraft carriers.

Challenging God's authority is worse than a Kamikaze attempt. At least the Kamikaze inflicted some damages to the Allied Forces. But any human's challenge against the Lord is worse than a tiny gnat flying in its full speed against the Mount Rushmore National Memorial and with a thought that he could break Mount Rushmore.

In chapter 15-17 of the Book of Numbers, we find the Israelites challenge God's authority time after time even right after they were rejected from entering into the Promised Land because of their disobedience to Him. I don't believe that this is an isolated case from their four thousand years old history, rather it is still happening in churches and individual lives in the 21st Century.

A. ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Numbers 15:1-4 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, 3 and you make an offering by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to the Lord, from the herd or the flock, 4 then he who presents his offering to the Lord shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil;

I believe that this was one of the lowest points in Israel's history. It had just rebelliously rejected God's offer to bring the nation into the Promised Land. Consequently they had to wander in the wilderness for the next 38 years until all the unbelieving first generation had perished in the Sinai Wilderness.

for not 38 days, not 38 weeks, not 38 months, but 38 long years of sentence of the chastisement from the Lord, Israel's next generation received a precious promise from the Lord that would give them encouragement, hope, and strength to go on.

I want you all to pay attention to the word the Lord used in v2.

Numbers 15:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you

The Lord did not tell them "if", but "when". God has not, and will not give up on Israel. Like Israel might have felt, many believers under the rod of God's correction

may feel that he was abandoned by God, as if He had given up on him. But God is always near to the believer under correction.

Because of their sins, the Lord was merciful to tell them to bring sacrifice that would cover their offense – sacrifices to cover sin and sacrifice as an expression of thanksgiving.

B. A REMINDER OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

Numbers 15:37-41 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 38 "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. 39 And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, 40 and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. 41 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God."

Everybody needs a reminder, some need more than others though. The blue thread was a God's reminder to them to remember His commandments. I would not doubt that a blue thread was commanded because the Ark of the Covenant was covered with a blue cloth, blue curtains adorned the tabernacle, and blue was in the high priest's garments. Of course, blue represents 'heaven.'

However, man's instinctive pride always has a way of perverting such good and holy commands of God. In Jesus' day, He directly rebuked the abuse of this command among the religious elite, speaking of how they would enlarge the borders of their garments, making the tasseled area as conspicuous as possible, as an ostentatious display of their "holiness."

Matthew 23:5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

It is not what we put on that makes us godly, but what we have in our hearts and do for Him.

C. CHALLENGING GOD'S SERVANT'S AUTHORITY

Numbers 16:1-11 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; 2 and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. 3 They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" 4 So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; 5 and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. 6 Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; 7 put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!" 8 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: 9 Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to

Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; 10 and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? 11 Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"

No matter how much God did for them or taught them, Israel was not a spiritually minded people. They still had Egypt in their hearts by their own choice and their lust for idols stayed with them.

Obviously Korah was a very influential man to have 250 renown leaders of the congregation. When they were challenging Moses and Aaron, God's choice leaders for the Israelites, they were challenging God Himself.

Korah accused Moses and Aaron of pride and self-seeking when he was the one who was concocting this scheme for his own benefit and self-serving. People like Korah always have a "Stated Reason" and a "Hidden Reason." He was acting as if he represented the entire congregation. He didn't care for them, He just wanted to be the head honcho like Moses. These 250 leaders had not learned from Aaron and Miriam's revolt that God appointed Moses as their leader.

The most important place in the Christian life is the place of God's choice, the place He has prepared for us and prepared us to fill. The important thing is not status but faithfulness – doing God's work according to His way.

One of the most frustrating things in the world is to try to serve God in the area where you are not called. But in this case, Korah was not called because God knew his selfishness.

D. GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE REBELS

Numbers 16:26-35 And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins." 27 So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children. 28 And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. 29 If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. 30 But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord." 31 Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. 33 So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. 34 Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!" 35 And a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

God made it very clear that the Jews were to accept their appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron, and respect their authority. It is a dangerous thing for people to challenge God's authority and promote themselves to become leaders whom He didn't call. They not only rebel against the Lord, but against their own lives.

The older generation of Israelites repeatedly refused to submit to the authority of God's Word as well as the authority of God's appointed leaders. Believers today commit the same sins, and the consequences are evident: divided churches, dysfunctional families, and disobedient individuals who wander from church to church but never accomplish much for the Lord. Unless we submit to God's Word and God's chosen leaders, we can't successfully claim our inheritance in Christ and accomplish what God wants us to do.

Hebrews 13:7-9 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. 9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you

We need to be careful not to be divisive and contentious people and also stay away from them.

Titus 3:10-11 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

E. DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH?

Numbers 16:41 On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord."

Numbers 16:44-50 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. 46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. 49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. 50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

What began with less than three hundred rebels had now become a national uprising! Obviously these people didn't get punished enough. Carnally minded people cannot perceive the spiritual meaning of what God does because they lack spiritual discernment.

In two days 15000 people (about three hundred the day before and 14700 this day) had died because of their foolish rebellion against the Lord.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Please note what the high priest Aaron did in v48:

Numbers 16:48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.

What Aaron was doing here is a picture of Jesus Christ our Atoning Sacrifice. We were guilty sinners deserving judgment; we were rightly plagued. Our Savior was sent on His mission; He was unjustly accused and attacked; He prayed on our behalf, He "ran" to save us. Then He stood between death and life for us; and He is the only chance for salvation; being the dividing line between death and life; He was standing in the gap for our eternal life.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) It is not what we put on that makes us godly, but what we have in our hearts and do for Him.
- 2) Unless we submit to God's Word and God's chosen leaders, we can't successfully claim our inheritance in Christ and accomplish what God wants us to do.
- 3) We need to be careful not to be divisive and contentious people and also stay away from them.