

“Storyline: Rebels!”

Numbers 16

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First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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His name means “bald” and since names were usually given at birth, it probably represents the truth. He was born a bald baby boy. Did his parents remember that with a smile? Did his cousins tease him when they heard about it? The truth is we just don’t know. But if his cousins did tease him, it might help to explain things.

For after all, they were probably raised together. Extended families lived close in those days. They had to. They depended on each other. So the three boys probably spent a fair amount of time together.

And as they grew up their extended family gave them a sense of pride and purpose. For all of them were Levites, great grandsons of Levi who was of course the third son of Jacob, born to Leah in the land God gave Abraham before Israel went down to Egypt.

I imagine they were all strong and strong-willed, natural leaders. And each of them, the Book of Numbers says, played major roles in the drama that unfolded in the wilderness after the Exodus. Aaron, the oldest, became high priest. Moses, the youngest, became God’s prophet and Israel’s leader. And Korah? Korah became a rebel.

“One day” Numbers says, “Korah son of Izhar, a descendant of Kohath son of Levi, conspired with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben. And together they incited a rebellion.”

A rebellion is defined in the dictionary as a rejection of authority and leadership. And both parts of the definition show up pretty clearly in Korah’s rebellion. “You have gone too far!” he tells his cousins. You have claimed too much. He rejects their authority.

Then he rejects their leadership. “The whole community of Israel has been set apart by the Lord, and He is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than the rest of the Lord’s people?” A rejection of authority, a rejection of leadership; it’s a rebellion alright! And it has 250 of Israel’s leaders and who knows how many of the people behind it.

In 2006 a story appeared in the LA Times. The story described a new religion that's making its way onto the world scene. Begun by a Massachusetts psychologist, it's gaining popularity in America, Europe and Asia. It's called "Yoism," and its identity rests on two core convictions. The first is a rejection of divine revelation. The second is an "open source" principle where the community becomes a collective source for religious truth.

Yoism operates primarily on the Internet where discussions are carried on among members about what belongs in the Book of Yo. The Book has thousands of authors. Each potential contributor makes a suggestion. Then the community takes over and by consensus determines whether or not a particular suggestion merits inclusion in the Book.

Dan Kriegman, who founded Yoism in 1994 is quoted in the article as saying he just wanted to make religion open to change. "I don't think" he says "that anyone has ever complained about something that didn't lead to some revision or clarification in the Book of Yo."

So could I see a show of hands? Would any of you like to become Yoists this morning? No! Well, honestly I hoped you'd vote that way because I'm convinced my friends and I hope you are too.

A religion formed from the contributions, complaints and consensus decisions of human beings can never replace the relationship that God offers us through the storyline of the Bible. For in the Bible, the God who creates us and saves us offers us more than just the opportunity to gather together and share our collective wisdom. He offers us His wisdom and then he offers us something more. God offers each of us the opportunity to take up a place of service within the community He creates, a place of service where our unique gifts can help meet the community's deepest needs.

With that truth in mind, would you look back again with me for just a moment at Numbers 16? "You have gone too far!" Korah says to Moses. But the truth is Moses has gone no farther than God has led. Even so, it is too much for Korah.

"The whole community of Israel has been set apart by the LORD," he says, "and God is with all of us." True, but it's not the whole truth. The community does belong to God and God is indeed with all of them. But within the community He has created, God has called different groups to different kinds of service.

In Numbers 3 for example God calls the tribe of Levi. They alone are to serve the community by caring for the Tabernacle. Then in Numbers 4 God calls different parts of the tribe to different tasks. One family is in charge of the Ark and the furnishings of the tabernacle. Another is in charge of the poles and the structure. Still another is given the task of caring for the tent and the curtains. But one man God calls to oversee all this work and to serve as his priest. The man's name is Aaron, Korah's cousin.

So just for a moment put yourself in Korah's sandals, would you? Why should he take directions from his cousin? He's every bit as much of a leader as Aaron is. He's every bit as strong, every bit as wise. And he has good ideas about the tabernacle and about how to worship. His followers like his ideas. They think he's a stronger leader than Aaron. So why should Korah believe that God has called Aaron alone to be a priest?

In the moment those thoughts take root in his mind Korah becomes a rebel; not only a rebel against his cousin; in fact not even primarily a rebel against his cousin, but rather a rebel against God. For the essence of rebellion against God is the rejection of God's authority, His leadership, His lordship, His ability to guide and direct the course of our lives. We learned that lesson back in the beginning, remember?

And the serpent said to the woman "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said, "We can eat from the fruit of most of the trees; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, and you shall not touch it. If you do, you will die.'"

And the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened. You will be like God. You will know good and evil for yourself."

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that it was something to be desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and she ate it."

Rebellion in Genesis was all about the rejection of God's authority, His Lordship, His leadership and in Numbers it is no different. Moses knows it. So he says it.

"Now listen, you Levites! Does it seem a small thing to you that the God of Israel has chosen you from among all the people of Israel to be near him so you can serve in the Lord's tabernacle and stand before the people to minister to them? He has given this special ministry to you and your fellow Levites but now you are

demanding the priesthood as well? The One you are really revolting against is the Lord!”

Rebellion in the community God creates always starts with a rejection of God’s authority, His Lordship and leadership. And the truth my friends is we are all rebels. For we all try to rule the course of our lives more than we ever want to honestly admit. One man though admits it. And his name is Kevin Baugh.

Kevin Baugh is the ruler of his own country ...The Republic of Molossia. And if you don't mind, he'd prefer you call him "His Excellency." After all, he has an impressive khaki uniform, six medals, a gold braid, a blue and green and white sash. Oh! ... and a general's cap with a gold starburst on the bill!

Never heard of The Republic of Molossia? That's understandable, because it consists of Baugh's three-bedroom house and 1.3 acre yard outside of Dayton, Nevada. According to an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, Molassia "has a space program (a model rocket), a currency (pegged to the value of chocolate-chip cookie dough), a railroad (model size), a national sport (broomball), and—in his landlocked desert region—a navy (an inflatable boat)."

The newspaper goes on to say: "Baugh is the 45-year-old father of two, a do-it-yourself nation builder who raises a flag over his front yard each morning and declares his property to be, as Baugh puts it 'the kingdom of me.'"

For Ken, it's all fun, mostly a joke. But the truth is Ken Baugh is doing what we all want to do, isn't he? We all want to build a "kingdom of me." We all want things to be the way we want them to be.

But there is One who loves us too much to leave us in charge of our own kingdom. He is the Sovereign God of the universe who has created each of us. He knows what we need better than we do. And he offers us an opportunity to be led by His Spirit into a community where our unique gifts can help meet our community’s deepest needs. No, we can’t all be leaders but do we really need to be?

Let’s pray