Parasha Korach

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן-יִצְהָר בֶּן-קְהָת בֶּן-לֵוִי וְדָתָן וַאֲבִירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן-פֶּלֶת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן: וַיָּקֻמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וַאֲנָשִׁים מִבְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל...

In last's weeks Parasha we were given a visible reminder to every Israelite that God is serious about His laws, and that the consequences for disobedience could be severe. *Tzitzit*, what the English translations usually call fringe, was to be that memory device. Every Israelite male was to wear *Tzitzit*; a tassel made of white linen threads, wrapped around a single blue woolen strand, and then worn on the corners of one's garment. Though the Scriptures do not specifically address the issue of women in this matter, it was apparently considered optional and allowable for women to attach *Tzitzit* to their garments. The desired effect of the *Tzitzit* upon the people was not at all supernatural. The *Tzitzit* carried no power, and they had no place in ritual. Rather they played upon the most powerful of human senses, sight, to achieve the goal of reminding the Israelites of the Torah commands so that they would not risk offending God and then have to suffer divine, or civil, punishment. But the *Tzitzit* were also a sign; a sign of holiness. Even more specifically, they symbolized a measure of nobility and a measure of priestly service that every Israelite was both honored to have and expected to maintain. The key to understanding *Tzitzit* is that they were an exception to the prohibition against common Israelites wearing clothing made of two different kinds of material. The law was that one could wear all wool OR they could wear all linen; but the two could not be mixed. However, since the tribe of Levi had been separated away from Israel and assigned a special duty as God's designated servants and priests, the High Priest and the ordinary priests had a couple of items of clothing that were made from mixing wool and linen; this mixing of materials is, in Hebrew, *sha'atnez.* The *Tzitzit* was the ONLY item that common Israelites could wear that was *sha'atnez.* And it was the only item of its kind that could be worn outside of the Tabernacle grounds. The reason for this is the law that any holy item can only be used when in the precinct of the Temple. Sacred items of any kind had to remain within the courtyard of the Tabernacle or Temple, because that was the only holy ground. If any sacred item was taken, or worn, outside of the holy precinct, that item would become defiled. But the reverse was also true and had to be equally guarded against any common item that was offered to God, or used in service for God, became holy. And this presented its own set of problems and consequences. Now, as we move into the parasha, we will find several of these principles found in Numbers 15 brought into play. Let's get started...

The Israelites have been demoralized by the reports of the 10 scouts, rebelling out of fear and were punished by Adonai by turning them back into the Wilderness. Even more there has been a God ordered division of duties and also a status change and setting up of rank and order within Israel that elevated some folks and lowered others.

The situation is tense and beginning to spin out of control; and those men who are supposed to be leaders and helpers to Moshe now become anti-leaders and they foment rebellion. Korach, Datan, and Aviram; their goal is to assume control of the power center of Israel, the Priesthood. This is a rather interesting mixture of allies; Korach is a Levite from the line of Kohath. On the other hand, Datan and Aviram are from the tribe of Reuben. So how does this unlikely brain trust get together? They are camped together on the south side of the Israelite encampment. They lived right next to one another, and their lives were thus mingled. Certainly, the Levites lived on the more inner, and therefore holier, ring of tribes and clans that surrounds and protects the Tabernacle. But the close proximity obviously brought these two groups into constant contact. Yet these weren't the only ones involved in the coup attempt; we are told in verse 2 that 250 other men of Israel… leaders from various other tribes… sided with Korach, Datan, and Aviram. It is clear from the account, though, that it is the Levite Korach who is the chief instigator. In a short while we'll see that Datan and Aviram, Reubenites, had a little different agenda than Korach. But at the moment they are united in their accusations against Moshe and Aharon, who are generally seen as a team (they are brothers, after all). And their accusation is that Moshe and Aharon have taken too much power for themselves and set down too many rules that put they and their families over the others. They also assert that they were self-appointed. But it goes even further and what they next claim is a direct result of what we read about last week in Parasha Shelach Lecha, about the *Tzitzit*. By now all or most of Israel was wearing *Tzitzit*. And for some it went to their heads. They apparently grasped (though in a rather twisted way) that the wearing of *Tzitzit* brought them a measure of nobility and priestly status; and now they wanted to cash in on it. So, they say, "*hey Moshe, all the community is holy, not just you and Aharon.*" They deduced (for self-serving reasons) that with the wearing of the *Tzitzit* that they were now of equal status with the Priesthood, and with Moshe. Wrong.

So, Moshe instantly devises a test as a means to demonstrate the superior holy status of the Priesthood versus the inferior holy status of the remaining Levites, and still lower holy status of common Israelites, even with the newly authorized wearing of Tzitzit. And the test is that each are to bring fire pans, censors, filled with burning coals and incense, and they are to be presented to Adonai at the door to the Sanctuary. Moshe includes a warning in this by telling Korach and his henchmen that it is not Moshe and Aharon who have overreached their authority, it is those who have stepped forward to challenge the men Adonai has installed as the leaders of Israel. The way the test works is that God will permit access (presumably inside the Holy Place, that front room of the Tent) to those whose incense He accepts. In other words, Korach wants he and his men to be the Priests, and the chief indication of a priest is that he gains access to God by means of being able to go inside the Holy Tent.

Korach and the 250 leaders and apparently some amount of the others do as instructed and show up at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting with their fire pans. Without doubt, this was NOT at the door that was the entrance to the Sanctuary Tent itself, but rather the gate into the Tabernacle Courtyard, that everyone gathered. Then the Presence of God (*kavod*, glory) appeared before everyone and the Lord spoke to Moshe and Aaron and tells them to stand aside, that He is going to annihilate everyone who is involved. Now it must be that only Moshe and Aaron heard Adonai speak or else certainly all these men would have turned pale and run for their lives. And as had happened in the past, the Mediator of Israel falls on his face and begs for mercy for these very men whose goal it was to do away with Moshe and Aharon in a coup. Moshe tells the community to stand away from the tents of the wicked men, the reference to community in this case was to all those who did NOT stand with the rebels. And this is emphasized when Moshe tells the innocent to disassociate themselves from the rebels, not to even touch any item that belongs to them, lest they wind up being collateral damage when the guilty get punished. Even after many were burnt up and the ground swallowed many, it seems, it didn't solve the root cause of the rebellion. On the surface, the rebellion was about a group of men who wanted Moshe and Aharon's jobs; underneath it all was the rebels' belief that neither a Mediator NOR a High Priest was needed to represent the people to God. And right there is the stumbling block that the entire human population faces right on up until today. Moshe and Aharon were the point of the argument then; our Mediator and High Priest, Yeshua, is the point of that argument now. How many "spiritual" people say that there is no need for a Mediator; that they can, and have, earned the right to be in God's presence. Usually, they verbalize this by saying that "I'm a good person" or "I've lived a good life". Yet, if they are asked if they thought they were going to go to heaven, the majority of people say they believe in God, said that yes, they think they are going to heaven. Reason: I've done more good things than bad things.

Moving on… when God destroyed the rebels, many of the people of Israel, friends and relatives of the now deceased, blamed Moshe and Aharon. So, although the terrifying demonstration of divine wrath had indeed destroyed many rebels, the rebellious mindset of Israel remained intact. The Torah lays the blame for this whole thing directly on the shoulders of Korach. Please note that Satan, while active on Earth since the time of Adam and Eve, was not blamed, as we of the modern Church tend to do too much. It's not that Satan is blameless or harmless; it's that we are not somehow helpless against Satan's temptations. We CAN resist the Devil. We CAN choose to obey the Lord and not succumb to haSatan's direction. What Korach fell subject to was his own evil inclination, his *yetzer hara;* and that is what most of us do, when we sin against Adonai. As the story continues, in Numbers chapter 17 we see how the rod of Aharon miraculously buds. Now, I have often wondered what was so significant about this passage. As I reflected on it, I began to see some profound truths in this passage.

We read of how God had quelled the rebellion of Korach and his followers. Even after God destroyed the rebels against Moshe and Aharon, there were still challenges against their authority. There were especially challenges to Aharon's position as High Priest, so God establishes a test. All of the leaders of the twelve tribes were to submit a rod from their leaders. The names of each leader were to be written on the rods and then these were to be placed before the Ark of the Covenant. The rod that would bud would be the one that would indicate the one chosen to be the High Priest. Let us examine some details of this story at this point. The Hebrew word for rod in this passage is mattah. What we often find is that God often uses words with double meanings to prove a point. This word, mattah, has several meanings. It can mean a rod or a branch. It can have the meaning of chastisement as with a rod or governing as with a scepter. It can be a walking staff and it can also represent the support of life. This word mattah is used in the following verse out of *Ezekiel 4:16: "Then he said to me, "Son of man, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem. They will eat bread by weight, in anxiety, and they will drink water by measure, in horror."* The word mattah can also mean tribe. In this passage we see that twelve rods are chosen to represent twelve tribes.

The rod of Aharon in this story has two qualities: It is alive and it is fruitful. We read in this account that it is the staff representing the tribe of Levi that buds. I once wondered why God chose the tribe of Levi to provide spiritual leadership for the nation of Israel. In the book of Genesis we see that Levi was one of Jacob's worse sons. Consider Jacob's last words to Levi: Genesis 49:5-7 tells us, *Simeon and Levi are brothers, instruments of violence are their knives. [6] In their secret counsel may my soul not enter. In their contingent may my honor never be united. For in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they maimed oxen. [7] Cursed be their anger for it was strong and their rage for it was cruel, I will disperse them in Jacob, I will scatter them in Israel.* From reading this passage it seems that Levi would be on the bottom of the list to be chosen to lead the spiritual life in Israel. This, however, was not the case. So why Levi? Why not Judah or one of the other tribes? I believe the answer to this question is in the meaning of the name of Levi. The name Levi means "attached." I believe this meaning is significant. In Scripture names have great meaning. I believe that God in choosing Levi is saying that He is seeking a people who would be attached to Him. So, what did all the twelve staffs have in common before they were brought before the Testimony? They were all dead pieces of wood that had been broken off from their life source. In this story we see that the staff of Aharon blooms. If a normal staff cannot bloom because it has been severed from its life source, then the staff of Aharon blooms because it is attached to a life source, God Himself. I believe God chose the tribe of Levi to be the spiritual leader of Israel to show that such a position is not based on personal ability or merit, but rather on one's attachment to Him.

If we have life at all in our lives it is only because we are attached to Yeshua! In John 15:5-8, Yeshua speaks of branches: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.* God does not intend for Believers, His children, to be dead branches, but rather alive! When people saw Aharon's branch they took notice of it because it was different than the other rods everyone else carried. They weren't just dead sticks! Where those rods were dead and barren, Aharon's rod was full of life! Just as the rod resurrected with life confirmed Aharon's position over the other tribal leaders, so the resurrection of Yeshua confirms Him as the True Messiah over false religious leaders such as Buddha or Mohammed. I believe that the reason why many churches and synagogues are in decline today is because they are just dead sticks. They once may have been alive, but somewhere in their history they became broken from their Life Source. Many churches and denominations start out as great movements of God and then become monuments to those movements. After time, those monuments become mausoleums. Such is also true of individual believers who have fallen away. They have allowed themselves to be broken away from the Life Source and thus have the appearance of every other dead stick in the world. We must ask ourselves: When people see us what do they see? Do we look like all the other dead sticks in the world, or do we manifest the life of Yeshua?

The great thing about the rod of Aharon is that it is not just alive, but fruitful. It has almonds growing on it. Now something about a fruitful plant is that it has something to give away. I can imagine that when Aharon was walking about the Israelite camp with his rod that children must have run up to him asking for almonds. I don't know if Aharon actually gave away any of the almonds on his staff, but thinking about this made me think about our own spiritual lives. When I consider our position as believers, God certainly desires that we would have fruit to give away. God does not desire that we as believers would just keep the life of God to ourselves, but that we would be able to share His presence with other people. What is the fruit of the Messianic life? *Galatians 5:22-23, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.* Have you ever seen ripe apples on a neighbor's tree that you wanted to partake of? May the spiritual fruit in our lives be so tantalizing to those in the world that they would want to partake of it! May the peace and love in our lives be so real that others would desire to partake of that fruit! As I was preparing this teaching, I reflected on the different purposes that staffs had in the time of Aharon. In Numbers 17, we see that Aharon's staff was a source of identity for him. It was certainly the most famous staff mentioned in the Bible.

It was the staff of Aharon that was cast down before Pharaoh and transformed into a serpent. It was the raised staff of Aharon that the waters of the Nile were turned red and other miracles were wrought. In Numbers 17, we see that a budding staff would confirm his position as the spiritual leader of Israel. When Aharon walked about the camp of Israel, he carried with him life and spiritual authority! As I reflected on this I felt challenged. We as believers need spiritual authority everywhere we go. This isn't something just for priests in scripture or modern-day rabbis and pastors, but something for all believers. Those of you who have secular jobs come into contact with lost people every day. In what ways do you represent Messiah to the people you work with? Do they sense a real spiritual authority governing your life? What many people in the world are seeking is genuine spiritual authority. Consider *Matthew 7:28-29: "And so it was, when Yeshua had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."* We as believers are called to bring Yeshua to a lost and dying world. For those of us genuine believers, we are the authority on spiritual matters when relating to lost people. God would desire that we would carry that authority as confidently as Aharon carried his rod. It seemed that staffs during the time of Aharon were often used as weapons or to stave off wild animals. It was likely with a staff that Moshe drove off the shepherds that challenged the daughters of the priest of Midian.

When people looked upon the rod of Aharon perhaps they were reminded in how they trusted in their own rods for security. They saw something different with Aharon's rod, however, from their own. His rod alive with the presence of God. Aharon in carrying the living staff reminded the Israelites that they were to put their trust in a living God and not in the dead wood or metal of idols. God repeatedly reminded the Israelites that their military successes were not due to their own prowess, but in His power, a power He often manifested through Moshe and Aharon. David haMelech in writing the 23rd psalm found comfort in the strength of God, symbolized by a staff. *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.* (Psalm 23:4) The phrase *"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me"* uses the imagery of a shepherd's tools to describe God's care, protection, and guidance as we walk through the trials of this life. The rod and staff were practical items carried by shepherds in ancient Israel, and their spiritual meaning is central to understanding the verse. The rod was sturdy; often heavy wooden stick used for defense. Shepherds used it to fend off predators like lions or bears, to keep count of the flock, and to discipline wayward sheep. Spiritually, the rod symbolizes God's protection and strength. It reminds believers that danger does not automatically win, God can shield them, stop harm, and limit what comes against them. In some contexts, it also carries the idea of discipline in love, as in Proverbs 13:24, where correction is meant to keep the sheep safe and on the right path.

The staff was a longer, often hooked stick used for guidance, support, and rescue. Shepherds used it to direct the flock, keep them from wandering into danger, and to retrieve a sheep that had fallen or become trapped. Spiritually, the staff represents God's guidance, correction, and gentle redirection. It shows that God is not only a protector but also a guide, helping us stay on a safe path and bringing us back when we stray. The rod and staff are not the same, the rod is about defense and authority, the staff about guidance and support. Together, they show God's complete care: He guards us from harm and guides us through uncertainty. In Psalm 23, this comfort comes from knowing that even in the "valley of the shadow of death (as the wages of sin is death)," God is present, protecting and leading. These days many people look to different things for their security. They look to the things of the world. They look to the dead stick instead of the living vine. What do we put our security in times of difficulty? Is it in the dead wood of this world or in a living and loving God?

As Aharon was getting along in years I imagine that he leaned onto his staff for support. As I mentioned before, one of the places we see staff or mattah mentioned in scripture is Ezekiel 4:16, *"Moreover he said to me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment."* Staffs, indeed, seem to hold great significance for the ancient Hebrews. Here staff is used figuratively to speak of the support of life. As I reflect on the staff being something that one leans on to as a support of life, I have to ask what is that we often lean on? Do we lean on that which is living or that which is dead? The Apostle, Rav Sha'ul (Paul) faced many difficult circumstances in his life—situations that would have shattered him if he had relied on his own strength. We read in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 of a time in his life when he had to especially lean on the presence of God. *"Even in the extraordinary quality of the revelations. So that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me; a messenger of satan to torment me, so I would not exalt myself.* [8] *I pleaded with the Lord three times about this, that it might leave me.* [9] *But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Messiah may dwell in me.* [10] *For Messiah's sake, then, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* Rav Sha'ul in one of His most difficult hours leaned upon the Living Vine, Yeshua haMashiach. What is it that we lean on in the most difficult circumstances? The world? Our own resources? All of that is only dead sticks compared to Yeshua. A dead stick will break under certain pressure, but the Living Vine will support us no matter what!

What is it we carry in the world we live in? Is it barren and ordinary much like the staffs of other people? Or is it the living and fruitful? Do people see that you carry that which is living or that which dead? Does your life bear fruit that others would want to partake of? What do you identify yourself with? That which is worldly and dead or that which is living and eternal? What do you look to for your security? What do you look to for your support? Today there are some of you who are struggling. I want to tell you that you can experience a love and transformation by God that you have never experienced before; you can be a rod of Aharon. You may feel like a dead stick. I want to tell you today that there is hope. I want to tell you that the Spirit of God in you can transform you to become all that He has intended you to be. Present yourself as a stick in the tent of meeting, the synagogue, and wait for the transformation to begin.

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