

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 16

This chapter gives an account of a sedition of Korah and others against Moses and Aaron, (^{<0461>}Numbers 16:1-4), with whom Moses expostulates, and shows the unreasonableness of their clamour against Aaron, (^{<0465>}Numbers 16:5-11); sends for Dathan and Abiram, who were in the confederacy, but refused to come, which greatly angered Moses, (^{<0462>}Numbers 16:12-15); orders Korah and his company to appear before the Lord the next day, with Aaron, to have the controversy decided, (^{<0466>}Numbers 16:16-18); when all the congregation gathered together would have been, consumed had it not been for the intercession of Moses and Aaron, (^{<0469>}Numbers 16:19-22); and who, being separated from the rebels by the command of the Lord, some of the rebels were swallowed up in the earth, and others destroyed by fire from heaven, (^{<0463>}Numbers 16:23-35); and their censers were made a covering for the altar, as a memorial of their sin, (^{<0468>}Numbers 16:36-40); on which there was a new insurrection of the people, which brought a plague upon them, and destroyed 14,700 persons, and which was stopped at the intercession of Aaron, (^{<0464>}Numbers 16:41-50).

Ver. 1. *Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi,* etc.] A great grandson of Levi's, and own cousin to Moses and Aaron, being brothers children; for Amram the father of Moses and Aaron, and Izhar the father of Korah, were own brothers, both of them the sons of Kohath, and Amram the eldest, and Izhar the next, (^{<0466>}Exodus 6:16,18,21); this man is mentioned first, being the contriver, and plotter, and ringleader of the following sedition, and which is called "the gainsaying of Core", (^{<0461>}Jude 1:11); when this was made is not certain; Aben Ezra thinks this affair happened in the wilderness of Sinai, when the firstborn were exchanged, and the Levites were separated for holy service, (^{<0468>}Numbers 3:1,6,12,14); but, according to the Targum of Jonathan, it was after the law concerning the fringes was given, which it here follows, and was on that account; for it says, that Korah took his coat, which was all blue, and that the men with him rose up, and in the face of Moses taught

the rite concerning the blue ribbon; when Moses declared he had it from God, that the fringe should be of white, and one thread of blue should be in it; but Korah and his company made their coats and fringes all of blue, which the Lord commanded not: but what Korah is said to take is either himself, or men, or both, and not clothes, as follows:

and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took [men]; which men are described in (⁴⁰⁴²Numbers 16:2), even princes of the assembly, etc. or he, Korah, took himself, as Ben Melech, or divided himself, as Onkelos, separated himself from the congregation, and set himself at the head of a party he gathered together; and the “vau” or “and” before “Dathan” may be additional or superfluous, as Chaskuni observes, and so Abendana; and then the sense is, that Korah took Dathan, Abiram and On, apart by themselves, and entered into a consultation and confederacy with them against Moses and Aaron, with whom he was offended on account of the priesthood being bestowed on the latter by the former; and these men he associated to him, being the sons of Reuben, who would the rather listen to him, and join with him, because the right of the firstborn was taken from them, and the camp of Judah was placed before them; and with these men he could more easily commune, because the camp of Reuben and the Kohathites lay on the same side of the tabernacle, (⁴⁰²⁰Numbers 2:10 3:29); Eliab, the father of Dathan and Abiram, was the son of Pallu, the second son of Reuben, (⁴⁰¹⁵Numbers 26:5,8); but as for On, no mention is made of him elsewhere, nor any more in this place; it is thought he separated from his company after he had heard what Moses said to them; and the Rabbins say, his wife delivered him out of their hands, as Abendana observes.

Ver. 2. *And they rose up before Moses*, etc.] To his face, openly and publicly, in a bold and audacious manner; with impudence, as the Targum of Jonathan:

with certain of the children of Israel; some out of the several tribes, but perhaps chiefly of the tribe of Reuben, as Jarchi:

two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly; or “congregation”^{f220}, who were princes in the several tribes to which they belonged, heads of houses and families of their fathers, rulers of thousands, hundreds, etc.

famous in the congregation; or “called” ^{f221} to the tabernacle of the congregation; who, when the great men among the people were gathered together to consult about any affair, were called, as Ben Melech observes:

men of renown, or “of name” ^{f222}; in high esteem among the people for their birth and rank, their wealth and riches, wisdom and prudence; and were so before they came out of Egypt, as Aben Ezra remarks; so that the persons concerned in this rebellion were not the mob and dregs of the people, but men of the greatest figure and fame, and therefore was likely to be of bad consequence.

Ver. 3. *And they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron*, etc.] They met together by appointment, and went up in a body to Moses and Aaron:

and said unto them, [ye take] too much upon you; the one to be king, and the other to be priest; for they imagined that Moses took the civil government into his hands, and Aaron the priesthood, of themselves, without any call of God to either; but the contrary is most certain, (~~SRD~~ Hebrews 3:2 5:4); the Israelites, those of the other tribes besides Levi and Reuben, thought that Moses took too much upon him of his own head, to take the Levites instead of the firstborn, and confer a dignity on his own brethren, the sons of Kohath, who were near akin to him, and on all the sons of Levi, as Aben Ezra observes; and the Levites they conspired against him, because they were given to Aaron and his sons; and Dathan and Abiram entered into a conspiracy, as the same writer thinks, because he had removed the birthright from Reuben their father, and had given it to Joseph; for it is probable they suspected him, because of Joshua his minister; and Jarchi conjectures that Korah was angry because Moses had conferred the government of the Kohathites on Elizaphan, the son of Uzziel, the youngest son of Kohath, when he himself, Korah, was the eldest son of an elder son of Kohath: or “it is”, or “let it be enough for you” ^{f223}; or more than enough, as Jarchi; it is sufficient that you have had the government, both in things civil and religious, so long as you have; it is time to give it up to others, who are as well qualified as yourselves. The time past may suffice for the exercise of your despotic and arbitrary power; though it seems to be chiefly levelled against Aaron, and his priesthood, which they thought Moses had conferred on his brother of himself, any instruction from God:

seeing all the congregation [are] holy, everyone of them; having all heard the words of the Lord on Sinai, as Jarchi notes; and were all fit to be priests, and to offer sacrifice in and for their families, as they had used to do, before the separation of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood:

and the Lord [is] among them; in the tabernacle, to whom they could approach and offer their offerings without a priest to do it for them:

wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord? since they were all upon a level, everyone holy to the Lord, and might draw nigh unto him, and officiate as priests; wherefore they represent it as great pride and vanity in them; in Moses to take upon him to dispose of the priesthood at his pleasure, and make Aaron the high priest of the people; and in Aaron to take this office upon him, and to be an high priest, and not all the sons of Levi, but over all the children of Israel.

Ver. 4. *And when Moses heard [it]*, etc.] What they said, their complaint against him, for setting up Aaron for an high priest, and against Aaron for taking this honour to himself:

he fell upon his face; through shame, as the Targum of Jonathan, blushing at their sin, in opposing the ordinance of God; and through fear of the divine displeasure, and of the wrath of God coming upon them for such wickedness; and in order to pray to God for them to make them sensible of their sin, and give them repentance for it, and pardon of it, and avert his judgments from them such a conduct called aloud for.

Ver. 5. *And he spake unto Korah, and unto all his company*, etc.] The two hundred fifty princes that were with him; what follows was said to them apart from Dathan and Abiram, who seem not to be present at this time; and this was after Moses had finished his prayer to God, and had received instructions from him, by an impulse on his mind, what he should say unto them, and was now risen up from the earth he fell upon:

saying, even tomorrow the Lord will show who [are] his; his priests, whom he had chosen, and put into that office; this he would make known so clearly and plainly, that there would be no room left to doubt of it, and which was revealed to Moses while upon his face in prayer to God:

and [who is] holy; or whom he has separated to such an holy office and service:

and will cause [him] to come near unto him; and do his work as a priest, without fear of danger, and without any hurt, which is suggested would befall others; and they may expect it, who intrude themselves into such an office, and engage their hearts in a bold audacious manner, to draw nigh to God in it:

even [him] whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him: meaning Aaron with his sons, whom the Lord would make to appear that he had chosen, and put into the office of priesthood, and that it was not what Moses did of himself.

Ver. 6. *This do, take you censers*, etc.] Vessels to put incense in to offer, which was the business of the priests:

Korah, and all his company; the two hundred fifty princes that were with him, for so many we read took censers, and offered incense, (^{<04618>}Numbers 16:18,35).

Ver. 7. *And put fire therein*, etc.] Into the censers:

and put incense in them; on the coals of fire in the censers:

before the Lord; not at the altar of incense in the holy place, into which none but Aaron and his sons might come, but at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, where the glory of the Lord appeared, (^{<04618>}Numbers 16:18,19); and this they were to do

tomorrow; the day following that on which the insurrection was made, and in the morning of that day, which was the usual time of judgment; this was delayed until the morrow, that they might have opportunity to reflect upon what they had done, and repent of their sin, and consider what they were to do, and the danger which might attend it; as in the case of Nadab and Abihu, who, though sons of the high priest, yet offering strange fire, were consumed by fire, (^{<04610>}Numbers 10:1,2); and so might they for assuming the priesthood, and officiating in any part of it, which did not belong to them:

and it shall be, [that] the man whom the Lord doth choose, he [shall be] holy: meaning Aaron, with his sons; for though the Lord had already chosen him, and ordered him and his family to be separated from the rest of the Israelites, to exercise the priestly office, and he was actually invested with it, and had entered upon it; yet he would at this time, in a visible way

and manner, make it manifest that he had done it, and therefore should be as it were afresh set apart for holy service, and be continued in it:

[ye take] too much upon you, ye sons of Levi: of which tribe Korah was; and it looks as if those with him were chiefly of that tribe; however, these here addressed certainly were, and Moses retorts their own language upon them; they had said, that he and Aaron had taken too much upon them, though no more than what God had called them to; and now he says that they had taken too much upon them, to resist the ordinance of God, and to endeavour to remove from their office whom God had put into it, in order to substitute themselves: or “it is enough for you”, or “let it suffice you”; be content with the honour put upon you, the dignity you are raised to, to be next to the priests, and assistants to them; be not ambitious of more; let what you have satisfy you.

Ver. 8. *And Moses said unto Korah,* etc.] Continued his discourse to him, as the head of the conspiracy, and the ringleader of it:

hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi; to whom also he had been before speaking; though Aben Ezra thinks the first speech was made to Korah and his company, and what follows to the Levites.

Ver. 9. *[Seemeth it but] a small thing unto you,* etc.] It should not; for it was a great thing which the Lord had done for them, and with which they should have been satisfied, and for it thankful:

that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel: this was a special favour, and ought to have been esteemed such, that God, who was the God of the whole people of Israel in common, should separate the tribe of Levi from all the rest of the tribes of Israel:

to bring you near to himself; next to the priests their brethren of the same tribe, to be joined to them, and assist them in their service, and officiate in the court of the tabernacle, where the divine Majesty dwelt:

to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord; to watch it, and guard it, and keep out persons until to enter into it; to take it down and set it up, as occasion required, and bear and carry the holy things in it, and take care of them:

and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? which Jarchi interprets of their singing in the desk songs of praise before them; but Aben

Ezra, better, of the service they did for them, when they brought their offerings and sacrifices, which they took of them, and carried to the priests to offer for them.

Ver. 10. *And he hath brought thee near [to him]*, etc.] To be in his courts, to watch in his house, and wait on his priests, for which an ample provision was made by tithes. Korah is there personally addressed:

and all thy brethren, the sons of Levi, with thee; the whole tribe of them, excepting Aaron and his family, who were advanced to be priests:

and seek ye the priesthood also? the high priesthood, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan; this opens the true cause of their discontent and rebellion; they could not be satisfied with being the ministers of the priests, but wanted to be priests themselves, and Korah perhaps to be high priest.

Ver. 11. *For which cause, both [thou] and all thy company [are] gathered together against the Lord*, etc.] For gathering together against his ministers, whom he had put into office to act under him, and endeavouring to overturn a constitution of his erecting, and resisting and not submitting to an ordinance of his, is interpreted gathering against him, and acting in opposition to him; (see ^{<5131>}Romans 13:1,2);

and what [is] Aaron, that ye murmur against him? what is his transgression? what has he done? as Aben Ezra paraphrases it; he is not chargeable with any fault, he did not take upon him the office of high priest of himself, God called him to it, and put him in it; he is only his minister, and by no means to be blamed, and therefore it is unreasonable to envy him, or murmur against him; and, indeed, murmuring against him is murmuring against the Lord.

Ver. 12. *And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab*, etc.] He sent messengers to call them to the house of judgment, as the Targum of Jonathan, to the court of judicature, where the Jews suppose Moses, with the seventy elders, were now sitting: it seems these two men departed either before. Moses rose up from prayer, or however before he had finished his speech to Korah and the Levites; which being particularly directed to them, these men might think they had no concern in it, and went away to their own tents:

which said, we will not come up; this answer they returned to the messengers, and by them to Moses, declaring that they denied his power,

despised his authority, and would not obey his orders, and therefore refused to come up to the tabernacle, or to the tent of Moses, or to the court of judicature, wherever it was; perhaps the first is best. Aben Ezra thinks, that as the tabernacle was in the midst of the camp, it was on an eminence, wherefore those that came to it might be said to come up to it.

Ver. 13. [*Is it*] *a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey?* etc.] Meaning Egypt, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it; which, though a plentiful country, never had, nor deserved to have this epithet given it, which is peculiar to the land of Canaan, and is here given, in opposition to the description of that land, which the Lord himself had so described; and argues great impudence and want of reverence of the divine Being, as well as great ingratitude to Moses, the instrument of their being brought out of Egypt, where they laboured under bondage and servitude intolerable; and yet here represent it as an injury done to them, and as if the intent and design of it was purely to destroy them: for they add,

to kill us in the wilderness; with want of food, of which they had plenty in Egypt, they suggest; referring, it may be, to what the Lord by Moses had said to them, that their carcasses should fall in the wilderness; but that would not be for want of provisions, but because of their sins. It was bad enough, they intimate, to be brought out of such a plentiful country, into a barren wilderness; but what was still worse, the despotic and tyrannical government of Moses, as they represent it, they were brought under:

except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? ruling in an arbitrary way, making laws, and setting up offices and officers at pleasure, so that it is more eligible to be in bondage in Egypt than under thy government. Aben Ezra takes their meaning to be, as if the end of bringing them out of Egypt was to assume and exercise such rule and authority over them. His words are,

“hast thou brought us up out of Egypt, that thou mayest exercise dominion over us as a prince, yea, many dominions, thou and thy brother?”

and who also observes, that Egypt lay to the south of the land of Israel, so that one that came from Egypt to the land of Canaan may be truly said to come up, that part of Canaan lying higher than Egypt.

Ver. 14. *Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey*, etc.] Meaning the land of Canaan; but this was no fault of Moses, he had brought them to the borders of it, he had bid them go up and possess it; but they refused, and chose to have spies first sent into it, who brought an ill report of it, which they listened to, and had so provoked the Lord thereby, that he ordered them to turn back, and threatened them with a consumption of them in the wilderness; or “certainly”^{f224}, verily thou hast not brought us, etc. though the Septuagint version renders it affirmatively, “thou hast brought us”; and the Vulgate Latin version, indeed thou hast brought, directly contrary to the text; unless it is to be understood ironically, as it is by some:

or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards; that is, in the land of Canaan, as were promised them; they suggest, had this been the case, they could have been content that he should have been their prince, and they would have submitted to his government; but having received no advantage from him, but a great deal of hurt and damage, they could not but consider him not only as a tyrant, but as an impostor and deceiver:

wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? or “dig” them out^{f225}; either in a literal sense, wilt thou be so cruel and merciless as to put out the eyes of these men, Korah and his company, and us for our opposition to thy government? or though thou shouldst do so,

we will not come up; we are determined not to obey thee, but to shake off the yoke, let our punishment be what it will; or figuratively, dost thou take us for blind persons, whose eyes thou hast put out, and think to lead us at thy pleasure? or dost thou cast a mist before the eyes of this whole congregation, that they are not able to see through thy designs? are the people so bewitched by them, as not to see thy deceits and impostures? pretending to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey, which thou art not able to do, and now sayest that thou hast a message from God to return again towards the Red sea, and talkest of our posterity inheriting the land forty years hence; who is it that cannot see through all this? Aben Ezra thinks, by “these men” are meant the elders that were with Moses, whom he led as he pleased, and so blinded them with his delusions, as these pretended, that they could not see through them.

Ver. 15. *And Moses was very wroth*, etc.] Or “it heated Moses exceedingly”^{f226}; made him very angry, caused him to burn with wrath against them; even the speech they made, the words they uttered, not so

much on account of their ill usage of him, as for the dishonour cast upon the Lord:

and said unto the Lord, respect not thou their offering; their “Minchah”, the word is commonly used for the meat or bread offering. Aben Ezra observes, that Dathan and Abiram were great men, and had offered such kind of offerings before this fact; and therefore Moses desires that the Lord would have no respect to any they had offered, but have respect to him, who had never injured any of them. Jarchi gives it as the sense of some, that whereas these men had a part in the daily sacrifices of the congregation (with which a meat offering always went), the request is, that it might not be received with acceptance by the Lord; but he himself thinks it is to be understood of the offering of incense they were to offer on the morrow; and Moses desires that God would show his disapprobation of it, and which is the common interpretation. The Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem render it, “their gift”:

I have not taken one ass from them; either by force, or as a bribe, or by way of gratuity for any service done them; the sense is, that he had not taken from them the least thing in the world, anything of the meanest worth and value, on any consideration. Aben Ezra interprets the word “take”, of taking and laying any burden upon an ass of theirs; so far was he from laying any burdens on them, and using them in a cruel and tyrannical manner, as they suggested, that he never laid the least burden on any ass of theirs, and much less on them:

neither have I hurt any of them; never did any injury to the person or property of anyone of them, but, on the contrary, had done them many good offices.

Ver. 16. *And Moses said unto Korah*, etc.] Who was still with him, when the messenger returned from Dathan and Abiram, and who heard what Moses said in his own defence;

be thou and all thy company before the Lord; at the tabernacle, at the door of it; the Targum of Jonathan is, at the house of judgment, the court of judicature, where this affair was to be tried, and that was at the tabernacle, as appears by what follows:

thou, and they, and Aaron, tomorrow; the day after Moses had sent to Dathan and Abiram, on the morning of the next day; which as it was the time of sitting in judgment, so of offering incense; meaning Korah and his

company, the two hundred fifty men with him, and not Dathan and Abiram; and Aaron also, he was ordered to appear, whom they opposed, and with whom the trial was to be made.

Ver. 17. *And take every man his censer, and put incense therein,* etc.]

Which they were to bring with them the next day from their own tents; and these might be censers which they had in their several families, and which they had used in them before the order of priesthood was set up in Aaron's family, and limited to that; or they might be a sort of chafing dishes, or vessels like censers, and would serve the present purpose; they were ordered to put fire into them, that was to be taken from the altar of burnt offering; for strange fire might not be used;

and bring ye before the Lord every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers: according to the number of the men that were gathered with Korah:

thou also, and Aaron, each [of you] his censer; Korah and Aaron were to bring each their censers, between whom lay the contest concerning the high priesthood; which was to be determined by their offering incense before the Lord, and by his approbation or disapprobation of it.

Ver. 18. *And they took every man his censer, and that fire in them,* etc.]

That is, they came the next morning, according to order, prepared with their censers and incense; and they took fire from off the altar of burnt offering, which stood in the court of the tabernacle:

and laid incense thereon: upon the fire in their censers, and so burned it:

and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; not in the holy place, where the altar of incense was, for that would not hold them; nor indeed in the court of the tabernacle, but at the door of it, or the outside of it, that so they might be seen by all the people who came to be spectators and witnesses of this affair: and they stood

with Moses and Aaron; in a bold and presumptuous manner, as if they were their equals, disputing their authority, and putting themselves upon their trial before the Lord about it: the Targum of Jonathan says, these men stood on one side (of the door of the tabernacle), and Moses and Aaron stood on the other side of it.

Ver. 19. *And Korah gathered all the congregation against them*, etc.] Not his own company only, but as many of the whole congregation of Israel as he could get together, and especially the principal men; so that it seems there was a, general prevailing inclination in the people to take part with him against Moses and Aaron, who wished him success in his undertaking, and readily came together to animate and encourage him in it, and to see the issue of it. Jarchi suggests, that all night he was going to the several tribes, persuading them that it was not for his own private interest, but for the public good, that he acted against two men, who had taken to themselves, the one the kingdom, and the other the priesthood, and by this means got a great multitude together:

unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; that is, before it, where Korah and his company stood, whose part they took, and had like to have suffered severely for it, had it not been for the interposition of Moses and Aaron:

and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation; the Shechinah, or divine Majesty, which dwelt between the cherubim in the most holy place, removed and came to the door of the tabernacle, where the people were assembled, in the sight of them, showing some visible token of his presence, though no similitude of himself was seen; or, however, he appeared in the cloud that was over the tabernacle, in which was seen a glory, a brightness and splendour, or such coruscations and flashes of lightning as were very unusual and amazing, and plainly showed the Lord was there; so Jarchi says, that he came in the pillar of cloud.

Ver. 20. *And the Lord spake unto Moses, and unto Aaron*, etc.] Out of the cloud:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 21. *Separate yourselves, from among this congregation*, etc.] Not only from Korah's company, but from the congregation of the children of Israel, whom Korah had got together, besides the two hundred fifty men that were at first with him; who by their words and behaviour, and particularly by their association and standing along with him, showed them to be on his side, which greatly provoked the Lord:

that I may consume them in a moment; by fire from him, as the two hundred fifty men were afterwards consumed, (^{CHRS}Numbers 16:35).

Ver. 22. *And they fell upon their faces*, etc.] That is, Moses and Aaron, in order to deprecate the wrath of God, and beseech him to avert the threatened judgment; and so the Targum of Jonathan has it,

“they bowed themselves in prayer upon their faces;”

and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh; the Maker of all men, as of their bodies, which are flesh, so of their souls or spirits, which are immaterial and immortal; hence he is called “the Father of spirits”, (^{<S13D>}Hebrews 12:9), who, as the Targum, puts the spirit in the bodies of men; or, as others, who knows the spirits of men; their thoughts, as Jarchi, the inward frames and dispositions of their minds; who knows who have sinned, and who not; and whether their sins proceed from weakness, and being misled, or whether from a malevolent disposition, presumption, and self-will:

shall one man sin: meaning Korah, who was the ringleader:

and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation? who, through ignorance and weakness, and by artifice and imposition, are drawn in to join with him; the plea is much the same with that of Abraham, (^{<O1825>}Genesis 18:25).

Ver. 23. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] When on his face in prayer, and bid him rise up, and told him he had granted his request, and then spoke to him:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 24. *Speak unto the congregation*, etc.] Not to Korah’s company, but to the people of Israel, of the several tribes that were assembled together:

saying, get ye up from about the tabernacle of Korah, and Dathan, and Abiram; which was either the same with their tents, as in (^{<O1165>}Numbers 16:26); though, as they were of different tribes, Korah of the tribe of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben, their tents must be in distinct and different places, though both encamped on the same side of the tabernacle, and pretty near to each other; the camp of Levi was nearest the tabernacle, and the camp of Reuben next to it. It may be, there was a single tabernacle erected on this occasion, for all these men to meet at when they judged it necessary. Aben Ezra is of opinion, Korah had a tent for his men and substance, at a distance from the camp of the Levites, and to his tent joined the tents of Dathan and Abiram.

Ver. 25. *And Moses rose up*, etc.] Either from the ground, upon which he fell on his face, or from the seat on which he sat at the door of the tabernacle; though he seems to have stood there; it may be, it only signifies that he obeyed the divine order, and went about it directly, as often in Scripture persons are said to arise, when they go about any thing they are directed, or choose to do:

and went unto Dathan and Abiram; to endeavour to convince them of their evil, and bring them to repentance for it, and to reclaim them from their folly:

and the elders of Israel followed him; either some principal persons of the tribes, called elders, both from their age and prudence; or the seventy elders lately chosen to assist Moses in the affairs of government, as Aben Ezra thinks these followed him to show their respect unto him, and their approbation of his conduct, and for vindication of his character, which had been aspersed by those men, and to give the more weight to what should be said unto them, for their conviction and reformation.

Ver. 26. *And he spake unto the congregation*, etc.] To the people of Israel assembled together on this occasion: some, out of ill will to Moses and Aaron, inclining to the side of Korah and his accomplices, and some out of curiosity to see the issue of this affair

saying, depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men; these turbulent, seditious, and ill-designing men, disturbers of the commonwealth and church of Israel, enemies to the peace of its civil and ecclesiastic state: and when Moses desires the people to depart from their tents, he means not only that they would remove in person, and stand at a distance, but such who had their tents, and families, and substance near them, would take care to remove, lest they should be destroyed with them:

and touch nothing of theirs; not carry off anything belonging to them along with their own, being all devoted to destruction:

lest ye be consumed in all their sins; lest partaking of their sins they should of their plagues, and die in their sins, as they would, or for them.

Ver. 27. *So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side*, etc.] The place where they met together and made their general rendezvous; this it seems was encompassed on all sides by

people out of the several tribes, who either wished them well in their undertaking, or were curious to know how it would issue;

and Dathan and Abiram came out; out of the tabernacle of Korah, and went to their own tents; and came out of them,

and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children; in an audacious manner, as not fearing God nor man; they carried their heads high, and were not in the least daunted at what they were threatened with; and by their looks and gestures bid defiance to Moses and the elders with him.

Ver. 28. *And Moses said, hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works,* etc.] To bring the people of Israel out of Egypt, to exchange the firstborn for the Levites, to make Aaron and his sons priests, to give the Levites to them, and to set Elizaphan over the Kohathites, things which these men found fault with, and questioned his authority for doing them:

for [I have] not [done them] of my own mind; or “not out of my heart” ^{f227}; he had not devised them himself, and done them of his own head, and in any arbitrary way, without the will of God or any authority from him, as these men suggested.

Ver. 29. *If these men die the common death of all men,* etc.] Or “as every man dies” ^{f228}, or the generality of men, who for the most part die of one disease or another, as a fever, and the like, or through old age:

or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; with such visitations as men in all ages for their sins are visited with, meaning public calamities, such as pestilence, famine, and sword:

[then] the Lord hath not sent me; it may be concluded that I had no mission nor commission from the Lord to do what I have done, but may be reckoned a deceiver and an impostor; and I am content to be accounted so, should either of the above things be the case of these men.

Ver. 30. *But if the Lord make a new thing,* etc.] Or “create a creation”, or “creature” ^{f229}, what never was before, or put those persons to a death that none ever in the world died of yet; what that is he means is next expressed:

and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up, with all that [appertain] unto them; their persons, their wives, children and substance:

and they go down quick into the pit; alive into the grave the opening earth makes for them; this is the new thing created; though the Rabbins say ^{f230}, the mouth of the earth, or the opening of the earth, was created from the days of the creation, that is, it was determined or decreed so early that it should be:

then ye shall understated that these men have provoked the Lord; by rising up against Moses and Aaron, and so against the Lord; by falsely accusing his servants, and endeavouring to set the people against them, and so alter the constitution of things in church and state.

Ver. 31. *And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these things*, etc.] As soon as he had finished his discourse, which was addressed to the congregation, and, according to Josephus ^{f231}, after a long prayer to God, which that writer gives at large; immediately so it was,

that the ground clave asunder that [was] under them; on which they stood, not from any natural cause, as by subterranean volcano, forcibly making their way and bursting the earth, and so getting vent, which has been thought to be the cause of earthquakes; but this was by the immediate hand and almighty power of God, and came to pass just as Moses suggested it would, and as soon as he had uttered his words, which made it the more observable.

Ver. 32. *And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up*, etc.] Dathan and Abiram, their wives, sons, and little ones, that stood at the door of their tents with them, and all their goods, as follows: the earth, as if it was a living creature or a beast of prey, opened its mouth and swallowed them up, as such a creature does its prey:

and their houses; which may be meant both of their families or households, and of the tents they dwelt in, which were their houses; (see ^{<BOOK>}Deuteronomy 1:6);

and all the men that [appertained] unto Korah: not Korah himself, for he was with the two hundred fifty men that had censers, and with Aaron at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation offering incense, and thereby making trial to whom the priesthood belonged; and who, it is highly probable, perished by fire with the two hundred fifty men, as Josephus, Aben Ezra, and others are of opinion; but the family of Korah, and not all of them, for his sons died not at that time, (^{<OBS>}Numbers 26:11); and there were of his posterity in the times of David, to whom several of the psalms

are inscribed, (^{<901>}Psalm 42:1 44:1 45:1 46:1 47:1) (^{<980>}Psalm 48:1 49:1 84:1 85:1 87:1 88:1); these were either out of the way upon business, the providence of God so ordering it for their safety; or they disliked the proceedings of their father, and joined not with him; or if they did at first, repented of it and forsook him, as it is probable on of the tribe of Reuben also did, since no mention is made of him in the destruction:

and all [their] goods: their household goods, their substance and riches, their gold, silver, cattle, and whatever they were possessed of: a very extraordinary case this and which perhaps gave rise to some fabulous things among the Heathens; however, if they can be credited, this ought not to be thought incredible; as Amphiaraus, who with his chariot and its rider are said to be swallowed up in the earth, struck by a thunderbolt from Jupiter, and were never seen more ^{f232}; and other stories are told of persons praying to their deities for secrecy and shelter, and the earth has opened and hid them; as Althemenes, when he had slain his father ^{f233}; and the nymph Thalia pregnant by Jupiter, who, for fear of Juno, wished the earth might open and take her in, and it accordingly did, as is reported ^{f234}.

Ver. 33. *They, and all that [appertained] unto them, went down alive into the pit*, etc.] The grave which the opening earth made for them, they and their families:

and the earth closed upon them; and covered them over; this it did of itself, as Aben Ezra remarks: this was a wonderful instance of almighty power, that it should open in such large fissures as to swallow up such a number of men, with their tents, goods, and cattle, and then close again so firmly, as not to have the least appearance upon it of what had happened, as Josephus observes ^{f235},

and they perished from among the congregation; and had a name and a place no more with them.

Ver. 34. *And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them*, etc.] Or because of it, as Aben Ezra; their cry was so loud, their shrieks so dreadful and piercing, that the Israelites about them fled to get out of the sound of them, as well as for their own safety. The Targum of Jonathan not only represents their cry as terrible, but gives the words they expressed at it;

“and all Israel that were round about them fled, because of the terror of their voice, when they cried and said, the Lord is righteous

and his judgments truth, and truth are the words of Moses his servant, but we are wicked who have rebelled against him:”

for they said, lest the earth swallow us up [also]; which they might fear, since they had provoked the Lord, by associating with these men, and countenancing them by their presence, as they had done; who would have consumed them in a moment at first, had it not been for the intercession of Moses and Aaron.

Ver. 35. *And there came out a fire from the Lord,* etc.] Flashes of lightning from the cloud in which he was:

and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense; not that it reduced them to ashes, but took away their lives, struck them dead at once, in like manner as Nadab and Abihu were, who though said to be devoured by the fire, yet their bodies remained, ([¶]Leviticus 10:2,4,5); and is often the case of persons killed by lightning; though Josephus^{f236} thinks they were so consumed as that their bodies were no more seen, and who is express for it that Korah perished with them in this manner; which is not improbable, since he took his censer and offered incense with them, and was the ringleader of them, and the person that contended with Aaron for the priesthood, which was to be determined in this way; and though he is not mentioned it may be concluded, as Aben Ezra observes, by an argument from the lesser to the greater, that if the men he drew in perished, much more he himself; and the same writer observes, that in the song of the Red sea, no mention is made of the drowning of Pharaoh in it, only of his chariots and his host, and yet he himself was certainly drowned: now these men burning incense which belonged only to the priests of the Lord, were by just retaliation consumed by fire, and which made it plainly appear they were not the priests of the Lord; and the judgment on them was the more remarkable, that Moses and Aaron, who stood by them, remained unhurt. This was an emblem of the vengeance of eternal fire, of everlasting burnings, ([¶]Jude 1:11).

Ver. 36. *And the Lord spake unto Moses,* etc.] Immediately after these men were consumed by fire from him; out of the same cloud from whence that proceeded, he spake:

saying: as follows.

Ver. 37. *Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest,* etc.] His eldest son, that was to succeed him as high priest, and who perhaps was upon the

spot to see the issue of things; and who, rather than Aaron, is bid to do what follows, partly because Aaron was now officiating, burning incense, and that he might not be defiled with the dead bodies; and partly because it was more proper and decent for the son to do it than the father; and it may be also because it was for the further confirmation of the priesthood in the posterity of Aaron:

that he take up the censers out of the burning; either out from among the dead bodies burnt with fire from the Lord, or out of the burning of the incense in them; these were the censers of Korah and the two hundred fifty men with him:

and scatter thou the fire yonder; the fire that was in the censers; the incense burning in them was to be cast out and scattered here and there, or carried to some unclean place at a distance, as a token of the rejection of the services of these men: and thus the Lord answered the prayer of Moses, that he would not have respect to their offering, (^{<01615>}Numbers 16:15); if incense is intended there; though that seems to refer only to Dathan and Abiram, and not to these two hundred fifty men:

for they are hallowed, incense being offered in them before the Lord, and therefore were not to be made use of in common service.

Ver. 38. *The censers of these sinners against their own souls*, etc.] Who by burning incense in them sinned, and by sinning hurt and ruined their souls:

let them make them broad plates [for] a covering of the altar; the altar of burnt offering, which, though it had a covering of brass, another made of these were to be over it, for the further security of it, being of from the fire continually burning on it; these censers were to be beaten into broad plates, by the workmen who understood how to do it:

for they offered them before the Lord, therefore they are hallowed; they offered them in his presence, they burned incense in them, and to him, though it was not their business, but the business of the priests; yet these being done, and by his orders, for an open trial who were his priests and who not, they were not to be put to common use:

and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel; a memorial sign, a sign bringing this affair to remembrance, as it is explained in (^{<01640>}Numbers 16:40); this was a sign to the priests, that they only were to offer every

kind of offerings, and to the Levites, who attended the priests at the altar continually, and so had every day a sight of it and of those plates upon it, which would remind them of this fact, and teach them not to usurp the priest's office; and to all the children of Israel, to learn from hence that none were to burn incense but the priests of the Lord, for doing which Uzziah, though a king, was punished, (^{<1458>}2 Chronicles 26:18-23).

Ver. 39. *And Eleazar the priest took the brazen censers*, etc.] The metal of which these censers were made is particularly observed, to show that they were fit for the use they were ordered to be put unto, namely, for a covering of the altar of burnt offering, which was covered with brass, that being very suitable, since fire was continually burning on it; and by this it appears that these censers were different from those of Aaron and his sons, for theirs were silver ones; the high priest on the day of atonement indeed made use of golden one, but at all other times he used a silver one ^{f237}; and so did the common priests every day, morning and night, when they offered incense ^{f238},

wherewith they that were burnt had offered; the two hundred fifty men burnt with fire from the Lord, having offered incense to him with the brazen censers:

and they were made broad [plates for] a covering of the altar; not by Eleazar, but by workmen skilled in the art of drawing or beating any kind of metal into thin plates, by the direction and order of Eleazar.

Ver. 40. *[To be] a memorial unto the children of Israel*, etc.] The whole body of them; this explains what is meant by sign, (^{<0468>}Numbers 16:38); that it was to put or keep in mind what follows:

that no stranger which [is] not of the seed of Aaron come near to offer incense before the Lord; not only any Gentile but any Israelite, and not any Israelite only, but any Levite; none but those of the family of Aaron might offer incense before the Lord;

that he be not as Korah and as his company; this makes it clear that Korah perished at this time, though it is nowhere expressed; and it seems pretty plain from hence that he perished by fire, as his company, the two hundred fifty men with censers, did:

as the Lord said unto him by the hand of Moses; either to Korah, who is the immediate antecedent, and who perished as the Lord had told him by

Moses he should; so some understand it, mentioned by Aben Ezra and Jarchi; or else to Aaron, as they interpret it; and then the sense is, that none but those of Aaron's seed should offer incense, as the Lord had declared to him by Moses; (see ^(Q1B)Numbers 3:10); or it may be rather to Eleazar, as Abendana, who did as the Lord spake to him by Moses, took up the censers of the men that were burnt, and got them beaten into broad plates, and covered the altar of burnt offering with them.

Ver. 41. *But on the morrow*, etc.] The day following the dreadful catastrophe, the earth swallowing up Dathan and Abiram, and all that belonged to them, the burning of Korah and the two hundred fifty men of his company:

all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses, and against Aaron; not the princes and heads of the people only, but the whole body of them; though the above persons that murmured against them had but the day before been made such dreadful examples of divine vengeance. This is a most surprising instance of the corruption and depravity of human nature, of the blindness, hardness, and stupidity of the hearts of men, which nothing but the grace of God can remove; the images of the awful sights many of them had seen must be strong in their minds; the shrieks of the wretched creatures perishing must be as yet as it were in their ears; the smell of the fire was scarce out of their nostrils; and yet, notwithstanding this shocking scene of things, they fell into the same evil, and murmur against the men, whose authority, being called in question, had been confirmed by the above awful instances:

saying, ye have killed the people of the Lord; so they called the rebels, and hereby justified them in all the wickedness they had been guilty of; and though their death was so manifestly by the immediate hand of God, yet they lay it to the charge of Moses and Aaron, because it was in vindication of them that it was done, and because they did not intercede by prayer for them; though it is certain they did all they could to reclaim them from their sin, and prevent their ruin; yet the people insist on it that they were the cause or occasion of their death, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan express it.

Ver. 42. *And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron*, etc.] To kill them, as the Targum of Jonathan adds; who, perhaps, upon uttering their murmurs, made up to them, and by their gestures showed an intention to murder them:

that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation; either the people did, to see whether they could observe any appearance of the displeasure of God against them; or rather Moses and Aaron looked that way for help and deliverance in this extreme danger, knowing there was no salvation for them but of the Lord, (^{<4823>}Jeremiah 3:23);

and, behold, the cloud covered it; as when it was first erected, and which was a token of the divine Presence, (^{<4815>}Numbers 9:15,16); perhaps it had dispersed immediately upon the death of the rebels, and now returned again in favour of the servants of the Lord:

and the glory of the Lord appeared; in the cloud, as in (^{<4816>}Numbers 16:19); to encourage Moses and Aaron, and to deliver them out of the hands of the people, and to the terror of them.

Ver. 43. *And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation.*] Whose tent was not far from it, about which the people of Israel were gathered; and from whence they came to the tabernacle, both for shelter and safety, and for advice and instruction how to behave in this crisis; they did not go into it, but stood before it; the Lord being in the cloud over it, they stood in the door of it, (^{<4817>}Numbers 16:50); so the Targum of Jonathan,

“and Moses and Aaron came from the congregation to the door of the tabernacle.”

Ver. 44. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] Out of the cloud:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 45. *Get you up from among this congregation*, etc.] That is, withdraw from them, and be separate, that they might not be involved in the same destruction with them, as well as that they might have no concern for them, or plead with the Lord in prayer on their account, but let him alone to destroy them, as follows:

that I may consume them in a moment; as he was able to do, and had proposed to do it before, but they entreated him that he would not, (^{<4818>}Numbers 16:21,22); as they again do:

and they fell upon their faces; in prayer, as the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem; and so Aben Ezra observes, it was to pray to deprecate the wrath of God, and to implore his pardoning mercy for this sinful people;

which shows what an excellent temper and disposition these men were of, to pray for them that had so despitefully used them as to charge them with murder, and were about to commit it on them; (see ^{<4154>}Matthew 5:44 ^{<4234>}Luke 23:34).

Ver. 46. *And Moses said unto Aaron, take a censer,* etc.] Which lay in the tabernacle:

and put fire therein from off the altar; the altar of burnt offering, from whence fire only was to be taken for burning incense; and lest Aaron in his hurry should forget to take it from thence, but elsewhere, and offer strange fire as his sons had done, Moses expresses the place from whence he should take it:

and put on incense: upon the fire, in the censer, which he was to do when he came into the camp, and not as soon as he took the fire from the altar: the censer with fire in it he carried in one hand, and the incense in the other; and when he was in the midst of the congregation, he put the incense on the fire, and burnt it, as appears from (^{<4167>}Numbers 16:47): this was an emblem of prayer, and a figure of the intercession and mediation of Christ, (^{<4160>}Psalms 141:2 ^{<4083>}Revelation 8:3,4);

and go quickly unto the congregation; the case required haste:

and make an atonement for them; which was usually done by the sacrifice of a sin or trespass offering, but now there was no time for that, and therefore incense, which was of quicker dispatch, was used for that purpose instead of it:

for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; some token of it, some disease was inflicted, which Moses had information of from the Lord, and therefore expressly says,

the plague is begun; a pestilence was sent among the people.

Ver. 47. *And Aaron took as Moses commanded,* etc.] A censer with fire in it from the altar, and also incense:

and ran into the midst of the congregation: though a man in years and in so high an office, and had been so ill used by the people; yet was not only so ready to obey the divine command, but so eager to serve this ungrateful people, and save them from utter destruction, that he ran from the tabernacle into the midst of them:

and, behold, the plague was begun among the people; he saw them fall down dead instantly in great numbers:

and he put on incense; upon the fire in the censer, which though it was not in common lawful to burn but in the holy place on the altar of incense, yet, upon this extraordinary occasion, it was dispensed with by the Lord, as it had been the day before when he offered it at the door of the tabernacle with the two hundred fifty men of Korah's company; and perhaps the reason of it now was, that the people might see Aaron perform this kind office for them, and give them a fresh convincing proof of his being invested with the office of priesthood from the Lord, or otherwise he could have done this in its proper place, the sanctuary:

and made an atonement for the people; by offering incense, which God smelt a sweet savour in, and accepted of, and his wrath was appeased and the plague stayed: in this Aaron was a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of his mediation, atonement, and intercession; wrath is gone forth from God for the sins of men, which is revealed in the law; and death, the effect of it, has taken place on many in every sense of it, corporeal, spiritual, and eternal: Christ, as Mediator, in pursuance of his suretyship engagements, has made atonement for the sins of his people by the sacrifice of himself; and now ever lives to make intercession for them, which is founded upon his sacrifice and satisfaction, his sufferings and death, signified by the fire in which the incense was put.

Ver. 48. *And he stood between the dead and the living*, etc.] The plague beginning at one end of the camp, and so proceeded on, Aaron placed himself between that part of it wherein it had made havoc, and that wherein yet it was not come; the Targum of Jonathan is,

“he stood in prayer in the middle, and made a partition, with his censer, between the dead and living;”

in this he was a type of Christ, the Mediator between God and man, the living God and dead sinners; for though his atonement and intercession are not made for the dead in a corporeal sense, nor for those who have sinned, and sin unto death, the unpardonable sin, nor for men appointed unto death, but for the living in Jerusalem, or for those who are written in the Lamb's book of life; yet for those who are dead in sin, and as deserving of eternal death as others, whereby they are saved from everlasting ruin:

and the plague was stayed; it proceeded no further than where Aaron stood and offered his incense, and made atonement: so the consequence of the atonement and intercession of Christ is, that the wrath of God sin deserves comes not upon those that have a share therein, the second death shall not seize upon them, nor they be hurt with it; for, being justified by the blood of Christ, and atonement for their sins being made by his sacrifice, they are saved from wrath to come.

Ver. 49. *Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred*, etc.] 14,700. Thus what they were threatened with, that their carcasses should fall in the wilderness, (⁴¹⁴²³Numbers 14:29), was more and more fulfilled:

beside them that died about the matter of Korah; these are not taken into the number here, even the two hundred fifty men of Korah's company, and the families of Dathan and Abiram, (⁴¹⁶²²Numbers 16:32); how many they were is not certain, but they were but few in comparison of these.

Ver. 50. *And Aaron returned unto Moses*, etc.] After he had by his atonement and intercession put a stop to the wrath of God broken forth upon the people:

unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; where Moses was waiting for his return, and to know the issue of this affair:

and the plague was stayed: even before Aaron left the camp, and is here repeated for the certainty of it, and to intimate that it continued to cease, and broke not out again.