

Korach's sons...

Korach 5782/2022

It seems that the Jewish people just cannot learn. After the incident with the spies, one would think that they would wander quietly and peacefully not trying to rock the boat. But no, open's this week's Parasha, and Korach, Datan and Aviram 250 members of the Jewish people's leadership team, decide to instigate a coup against Moshe and Aaron¹.

What ensues is the very public proclamation (through divine signs) that Aaron is the rightful leader as the Kohen Gadol, and that the Levites are assistants to the divine cause. Following this, the ground opens and swallows the rabble rousers whole!² The assumption when reading this story is that everyone dies, but later in the book of Bamidbar we learn that Korach's sons did not die³.

What happened to them?

There are differing understandings. Rashi tells us that when the insurrection began, they were involved, but then repented, and therefore they were punished somewhat, with the ground swallowing them, but the landed on a miraculously fenced area and survived to this day, albeit underground⁴. The Or HaChaim tells us that while Korach was punished, it was obviously clear that because his children survived, that he wasn't the true instigator of the rabble, and their survival would be a generational testament to that fact⁵.

There is an interesting account of Jonah seeing the sons of Korach in the depths of the world, singing their Psalms near the even shetiyah, the foundation stone, which is where the Temple stood⁶. Whereas Rabeinu Bachya tells us that we have evidence of the descendants of Korach would sing their ancestral Psalms in the Temple – written by Korach's sons following their survival.

These differing understandings, when weighed up, do not give us a clear answer as to what happened, except to tell us that something different happened compared to the rest of the rabble.

Perhaps then, a more interesting question to ask is why?

HaEmek Davar provides a beautiful response to this question – they didn't just repent – they completely changed sides. Upon seeing their father and so many of the leadership challenge Moshe in such a way, they came to Moshe and became his disciples⁸.

There was a realisation that Moshe's word, position and leadership was true. Afterall, the Jewish people had witnessed so many miraculous moments through Moshe, how could they not be? How could the sons of Korach lose all their honour and follow such an unjust cause? They couldn't and therefore they pursued a different course, providing themselves immortality through their reputation.

We would be good to remember the importance of pursuing justice and following the right cause, no matter who the leader is!

As Herbert and Anderson state "Loyalty to an unjust cause is a perversion of honour"⁹