

PARSHAT KORACH

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

1. Recall how Moshe Rabeinu asks God to make a "b'riyah" - a 'creation' - to prove to the people that he was only following God's direct orders (rather than making his own decisions / see Bamidbar 16:30). In relation to this word "beriyah":

- Where is the first time (and last time) in Chumash that the word "b'riyah" [shoresh bet.reish.aleph] is mentioned?
- Who (exclusively) can perform an act of "beriyah"?
- Based on these answers, how (and why) does specifically an act of "b'riyah" [as opposed to any other type of miracle] prove to the people that Moshe's & Aharon's leadership was indeed a divine decision?

d. Relate your answer to Pirkei Avot 5:9 concerning the ten things that were created on the 6th day "bein ha'shmashot" (note that the list includes "pi-ha'aretz" from the Korach story).

2. In 16:22, Moshe asks a very difficult question: Should one man's sin cause punishment for an entire group [= "eydah"]?

a. According to your understanding of this pasuk, does 'one man' refer solely to Korach, and "eydah" to the 250 men? - or does 'one man' refer to the Korach & the 250 men, and the "eydah" to the entire group that had gathered around? Support your answer, based on the use of the word "eydah" in earlier and/or later psukim (i.e. between 16:18 thru 16:25).

b. Does Hashem answer Moshe's question?

If so, what is that answer?

If not, then explain why not?

In other words, relate your answer to the next set of events described in 16:23-28.

c. How does your answer to part (a) affect your answer to part (b)? [Be sure to relate to 16:23-26.]

d. If an entire group were to be punished because of the acts of an individual, would you expect that the group might be somehow responsible for the behavior of that individual? [Explain why.]

3. In this week's Haftara, we read about the coronation of King Shaul by Shmuel (I Sam. Chapter 12). The most obvious connection to this week's Parsha is 12:3 ("et shor mi lakachti..."/ compare 16:15). What other thematic similarities exist between Shmuel and Moshe & Aharon?

In what manner is Shmuel similar to Korach as well? [Relate the type of reform that Shmuel performs during his life, in contrast to the complaints raised by Korach.]

In your answer, relate to actions of Eli's sons (see Shmuel chapter 3) and Shmuel's function as the political leader ("shofet") and his involvement in the establishment of the monarchy.

Relate also to Shmuel's genealogy (who was his great great grandfather?!), as can be deduced from Sefer Divrei Ha'yamim I.6:3-13)

See also Shmuel 3:19-20, 7:3-17.

In what manner does Shmuel, who is a Levi, act like a Kohen? (Relate to Shmuel 3:1-3, 13:8-12.)

How is this similar to Korach?

4. In earlier TSC shiurim (on Yom Kippur and Parshat Tzaveh), we discussed the special nature of the KTORET and its function as a protection from the consequences of "hitgalut shchina". Recall also the events that led to the death of Nadav & Avihu. Based on the conclusions of those shiurim, answer the following questions:

a. Why do you think Moshe suggests that the 250 men offer specifically KTORET in order to prove if they are chosen (see 16:5-7)? Do you think that this 'test' is Moshe's idea or God's? [See Ramban on 16:5 (towards the end).]

Relate your answer to the nation's ensuing accusation that Moshe has caused the death of God's people (see 17:6-15)?

b. Do you think that when Moshe first suggested this test, that he was aware of the potential outcome that all 250 men would be consumed by fire? In what other manner could this test have convinced these 250 men to remove themselves from Korach's revolt?

c. In your opinion, why is specifically the "ktoret" used to SAVE the people from their ensuing punishment, as described in 17:11-15?

PART II QUESTIONS for PREPARATION for this week's shiur

1. To the best of your recollection (i.e. before studying this week's Parsha), what exactly was Korach's complaint? Did he have only one complaint, or many? [If so, what were they?]

To help you answer (or realize the difficulty in) this question, let's say Korach could have had whatever he wanted - precisely what is it that he wanted?

Finally (once again to the best of your recollection), how was Korach punished - i.e. did he die, and if so, how?

2. Next, carefully study the story that transpires in 16:1-35, while paying attention to the following questions. [As you study these psukim, see if you need to revise any of your answers to the above question!]

Attempt to identify more precisely what Korach was complaining about, what he wanted, and the logic behind his protest. Be sure to note as well who else complains, and what their complaints are about.

As you summarize the various complaints that are raised against Moshe & Aharon, note if everyone raises them jointly, or can you identify different groups that complain about different topics.

Would you consider any of these complaints (at least partially) justified? If so, can you explain why they are not accepted?

3. In your opinion, what precisely was the purpose of the "ketoret" test (as described in 17:5-7)?

Was this test Moshe's idea, or did God tell him to suggest it? [Attempt to base your answer on psukim.]

What possible results could have the 'ketoret test' returned? Was it clear to everyone participating that if you 'lost' you would be killed? Can you explain why so many people (i.e. 250) were willing to participate in this test? Was there only supposed to be 'one winner' in this 'contest', or could have God accepted the offerings of more than one participant? If so, what would that indicate (or prove)?

4. As you study 16:7-11, note how Moshe adds an additional rebuke to "bnei Levi". Can you explain the logic of this additional complaint, and why it is directed specifically to the Levites?

Relate your answer to the purpose of this 'ketoret test' and to Korach's opening complaint of "ki kol ha'eyda kolam kedoshim". Could you say that Moshe claims that there is something 'hypocritical' about their new request to 'serve as priests'? If so, explain how and why.

5. Study 16:12-15 carefully, and be sure that you can follow the logic of everyone's statements. Attempt to explain the connection between Korach and Datan & Aviram. In your opinion, do they share the same complaint as Korach had mentioned earlier, or does their complaint focus on a different issue?

In your answer, relate to how and why Moshe summons them, and how and why they refuse that summons. Was Moshe inviting them to participate in the "ketoret" test? If so, why is angered by their refusal to participate? If not, why were they summoned? [Relate to the reason they send for not coming!]

Relate also to Moshe's special prayer to God in light of their rejection of his summons. What "mincha" is Moshe referring to?

6. Review now the entire chapter (16:1-35) once again; but this time around pay careful attention to WHERE (and when) each conversation and/or event takes place.

Does the narrative seem to be continuous, or do you find certain 'jumps' within it? If so, explain where.

In other words, are there certain details in the story that appear to be missing? If so, where?

7. In case you didn't notice, note how this chapter discusses events that take place in TWO different locations. Where are these two locations, and what is taking place at each one?

As you review these psukim, try to figure out precisely WHERE Korach is, especially when the punishment comes.

8. Review 16:24, and explain what (and where) MISHKAN Korach Datan v'Aviram is! Why do you think that it is referred to as a 'mishkan', and what was taking place there?

9. At the end of this story, do we find one punishment or two? If there are two, which group (at which location) receives which punishment? Relate your answer to the above questions.

Based on your answer, who (or to which group) is Moshe Rabeinu referring to in 16:20-22 when he asks, "should one man sin and the entire EYDAH be punished?"

Relate both to the psukim that preceded this question (16:16-19) and those that follow it (16:23-27).

10. If there are indeed two groups and two complaints and two punishments [hope you figured this out by now], which of these two groups does Korach lead?

Based on your answer, try to better understand the opening pasuk of the parsha "va'yikach Korach..." i.e. WHAT did Korach TAKE?!

11. Based on your study thus far, which specific punishment did Korach receive? Can you prove that he was indeed punished? [Quote a pasuk to support your answer.]

Relate your answer to Bamidbar 26:9-10!

See also Ibn Ezra on 16:35!

12. Considering that God has just created a "beriyah" to bury Korach & his followers, why do you think that the people accuse Moshe & Aharon for causing the death of "AM HASHEM" (see 17:6)? Wasn't this miracle enough to prove to the people that it was God's doing and not Moshe's? [How is the test of the "matot" (17:16-24) any more convincing?]

In this new complaint of the people, who are the "am Hashem" that Bnei Yisrael refer to, and which specific death do they claim that Moshe caused? [Relate the two different punishments discussed in the above questions.]

Use this distinction to help answer this question?

PART III - PARSHANUT

1. There are at least four different opinions in the Rishonim that explain WHAT Korach TOOK (see 16:1). First of all, try to explain WHY there are so many different opinions.

Then, see Rashi & Ramban. On what specific point do they argue? [Be sure to see the entire Ramban (it's long!).]

Next, see Ibn Ezra (second "dibur ha'matchil"), Rashbam and Chizkuni. In what manner is their approach to this question totally different than the approach taken by Rashi & Ramban. [What is the different basic assumption taken by each parshan?]

See now Seforno. Is his approach more similar to that of Ibn Ezra or to that of Rashi/Ramban? Explain why.

See also Rasa'g (in Torat Chayim) [he explains that "va'yikach" should be understood as "va'yigash" - i.e. and he came near.] In what manner is this pirush totally different than all of the other pirushim mentioned above?

Finally, see also the opinion of Rebbi Yona Ibn Janach (the final opinion quoted by Ibn Ezra in his pirush). What phrase does he 'add' to this pasuk? To which earlier interpretation is his pirush most similar?

2. Ibn Ezra (in his opening pirush / 16:1) claims that the entire story of Korach took place BEFORE chet ha'meraglim, i.e. while Bnei Yisrael were still encamped at Har Sinai!!

What problems in "pshat" lead Ibn Ezra to this conclusion?

See Ramban's rebuttal of this opinion (at the end of his pirush to 16:1). Note how Ramban explains his position in regard to the topic of "ein mukdam u'muchar"!

What problems in "pshat" does Ramban employ to support his opinion?

On what points does he actually agree with Ibn Ezra?

How does he resolve this within his own interpretation?

3. In 16:15, Moshe pleads that God not accept 'their MINCHA'; Read this pasuk carefully, noting its context.

Whose MINCHA is Moshe referring to [Datan v'Aviram's or Korach's]?

WHAT "mincha" is he referring to? [Is it a korban? If so, which one and who and where is it being offered?]

Now, see Rashi. Note how he offers both "pshat" & "drash".

[Use this to explain how Rashi distinguishes between pshat & drash.]

What is difficult with Rashi's explanation of pshat?

Why do you think he brings down a drash as well?

Now see Ramban. How and why does he argue with Rashi?

Relate Ramban's rebuttal to the questions in Part II above (i.e. to this week's shiur).

Note as well that Ramban also claims that his pirush is the basic "pshat". In your opinion, which pirush is closest to pshat - Rashi's or Ramban's? [or neither?]

Next see Ibn Ezra.

In what manner is Ibn Ezra's pirush totally different than Rashi & Ramban? Would you consider this pirush "pshat"? Explain why yes or no.

[Be sure to relate to how each parshan explains the second clause of this pasuk (16:15).]

Finally, see Seforno.

To which of the above pirushim is his pirush most similar? Would you consider Seforno's pirush as "pshat"? In what way does he differ from Ibn Ezra?

PART IV - Questions for shiur on the Haftara

I Shmuel chapters 11->12

1. To the best of your recollection, is Shmuel in favor of Bnei Yisrael appointing a king, or against?

In your opinion, is there any positive value in Am Yisrael having a king? If so, what is positive about it?

What is the danger in having a king?

2. Attempt to define the differences between "melech" (king) and a "shofet" (judge).

[Relate to type of government, transfer of power after death, ability to levy taxes and conscript soldiers, setting national policies, etc.]

Bring examples from Sefer Shoftim and from Shmuel.]

3. In what manner can (or does) "malchut adam" - a kingship of man - conflict with the concept of "malchut shamayim" - the kingship of heaven (i.e. God)?

[Relate to the words of Gideon in Shoftim 8:23]

4. See Devarim 17:14-20 in relation the mitzvah to appoint a king. [If you have time, see the various commentaries there.]

Is it a mitzvah to appoint a king?

[See TSC shiur on Parshat Re'ay.]

See also Rambam Hilchot Melachim chapter 1 Halacha 1.

If it is a mitzvah, why has it taken so long to fulfill the mitzvah? Why does Shmuel seem to be against it?

See also Mesechet Sanhedrin 29:2 (from the Mishnah).

[If a melech is something negative, then what type of government is ideal?]

[Now we can begin our study of the Haftara]

5. Skim chapters 7->13 in Sefer Shmuel (I), and note why and how chapters 8->12 form a separate unit?

[i.e. note how chapter 7 completes the topic of Shmuel as the leader, and how chapter 13 begins the topic of Shaul's kingdom.]

What is the topic of this unit (chapters 8->12)? How does its opening chapter relate to its closing chapter?

How do the chapters in between flow from one to the next?

6. Why did Bnei Yisrael ask for a king specifically at this time? In your opinion, was there more than one group among the people?

Why was Shmuel angry; and why did Hashem tell him to agree?'

7. Why are the people so worried about war at this time? What is their alternative if they do not appoint a king? Why do they ask Shmuel for a king, are they not capable of appointing a king by themselves?

8. From the story in chapter 9, does Shaul seem to be a 'natural leader'? How is his leadership character enhanced in Chapter 10? What is the reaction of the people after he is anointed king at Mitzpeh? Are there two groups? Explain each.

9. How is Shaul's leadership character enhanced in Chapter 11? Why does Shmuel re-anoint Shaul after the battle of Yavesh Gilad? Why is the reaction of the people more favorable this time?

10. Note how chapter 12 answers most all the questions raised regarding the problems of appointing a king in Chapter 8? To do so, note the following parallels:

	Chapter 12		Chapter 8
	=====		=====
Compare:	Psukim 3-5	to	Psukim 11-18
	6-12		19-20
	13-15		7-9

11. Note 12:3. In your opinion, is Shmuel 'showing off' or is he trying to set an example for Shaul? [Explain.]

Why is there an increased fear of corruption with the melucha (kingship)? Relate this to the contrasting parallel between Shmuel and Korach. [Compare with Bamidbar 16:15.]

12. What is the main point Shmuel is making in 12:6-15? How does this relate to the theme of Sefer Shoftim? [Who wrote Sefer Shoftim (and for what purpose)?

13. Shmuel causes it to rain during the wheat harvest (late spring) as a sign of God's anger to their request for a king. Is rain good or bad? At what time of the year?

How can this reflect the potential good (or bad) of appointing a king?

14. In 12:19 the people finally regret asking for a king. If Shmuel is truly against Bnei Yisrael having a king, why does he insist they now keep their king instead?

Does 12:22 help explain that reason? How?

Why does Hashem want a melech? Under what condition will the kingdom be successful?

b'hatzlacha,
menachem