

## 12.29 Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On (Numbers 16; 17; Psalm 106:16–18)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud. It also indicates answers to questions.

### Visuals and Tools:

- “Life of Moses” Series 3 Flash-a-Cards from A Beka Book and/or pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional needed materials.
- Incense (Taking all precautions against fire, burn incense as children enter classroom.)
- A walking stick
- Nancy Ganz’s treatment of this story is excellent in *Numbers: A Commentary for Children*, published by Shepherd Press, 2006. Ideas or quotes from this source will be noted by (*Ganz*).

**Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach:** Tips and terms are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *envy/jealousy*: wanting something someone else has or is
- *insolent*: boldly rude and disrespectful
- *censer*: a container in which incense is burned
- *holy*: set apart for God
- *plague*: a disease that kills many people

### Scripture: (ESV)

Numbers 16:1 Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. 2 And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. 3 They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?” 4 When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, 5 and he said to Korah and all his company, “In the morning the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. 6 Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; 7 put fire in them and put incense on them before the Lord tomorrow, and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!” 8 And Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: 9 is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the Tabernacle of the Lord and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, 10 and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? 11 Therefore it is against the Lord that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?”

12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and they said, “We will not come up. 13 Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us? 14 Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up.” 15 And Moses was very angry and said to the Lord, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed one of them.”

16 And Moses said to Korah, “Be present, you and all your company, before the Lord, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow. 17 And let every one of you take his censer and put incense on it, and every one of you bring

before the Lord his censer, 250 censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer.” 18 So every man took his censer and put fire in them and laid incense on them and stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. 19 Then Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

20 And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 21 “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” 22 And they fell on their faces and said, “O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?” 23 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 24 “Say to the congregation, Get away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.”

25 Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. 26 And he spoke to the congregation, saying, “Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins.” 27 So they got away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. 28 And Moses said, “Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. 29 If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the Lord has not sent me. 30 But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord.”

31 And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. 32 And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. 33 So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. 34 And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up!” 35 And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.

36 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 37 “Tell Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest to take up the censers out of the blaze. Then scatter the fire far and wide, for they have become holy. 38 As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they offered them before the Lord, and they became holy. Thus they shall be a sign to the people of Israel.” 39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned had offered, and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar, 40 to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the Lord, lest he become like Korah and his company—as the Lord said to him through Moses.

41 But on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of the Lord.” 42 And when the congregation had assembled against Moses and against Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting. And behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. 43 And Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, 44 and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 45 “Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” And they fell on their faces. 46 And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun.” 47 So Aaron took it as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped. 49 Now those who died in the plague were 14,700, besides those who died in the affair of Korah. 50 And Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, when the plague was stopped.

17:1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel, and get from them staffs, one for each fathers’ house, from all their chiefs according to their fathers’ houses, twelve staffs. Write each man’s name on his staff, 3 and write Aaron’s name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each fathers’ house. 4 Then you shall deposit them in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you. 5 And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus I will make to cease from me the grumblings

of the people of Israel, which they grumble against you.” 6 Moses spoke to the people of Israel. And all their chiefs gave him staffs, one for each chief, according to their fathers’ houses, twelve staffs. And the staff of Aaron was among their staffs. 7 And Moses deposited the staffs before the Lord in the tent of the testimony.

8 On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. 9 Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the Lord to all the people of Israel. And they looked, and each man took his staff. 10 And the Lord said to Moses, “Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumbings against me, lest they die.” 11 Thus did Moses; as the Lord commanded him, so he did.

12 And the people of Israel said to Moses, “Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. 13 Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the Tabernacle of the Lord, shall die. Are we all to perish?”

Psalm 106:16 When men in the camp were jealous of Moses and Aaron, the holy one of the Lord, 17 the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. 18 Fire also broke out in their company; the flame burned up the wicked.

### **Introduction/Review:**

Remember when God called Moses to be the leader of Israel at the burning bush? What was Moses’ response? [He didn’t want to do it.] Remember when Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s sons, brought their own censers to worship the Lord, thinking they were able to modify worship of God by their own authority? What happened to them? [God destroyed them with fire.] Remember when Aaron and Miriam thought they could lead just as well as Moses? What happened then? [Miriam was stricken with leprosy.] When Moses quietly kept his anger in check and submitted to the will of God, we say that he was what? [Meek.]

Remember what happened in last week’s story when the spies discouraged the people from going into the Promised Land? What was the punishment? [All the grown-ups would die; all the children would have to wait forty years before entering the Promised Land; the spies with an evil report died.]

### **Story:**

We don’t know just how far into the forty years today’s story takes us, but again we have a rebellion against authority. [Refer to the arrangement chart found below and in Lesson 12.24.] The Kohathites, who lived next to the Tabernacle on the south side, had the great privilege of carrying the Tabernacle furniture when Israel moved from place to place. Right next to the Kohathites camped the Reubenites.

#### ***Korah’s complaint***

One man, Korah the Levite, started complaining. We have talked about Israel’s complaining at least ten times before. Where does complaining first start? In one person’s heart. Where does it then spread? To one’s family and to one’s neighbors. [Point to Kohath and Reuben on the chart.] After that, it spreads like wildfire.

What was Korah’s complaint? It’s one we’ve already heard and one God judged severely: it was about Moses’ and Aaron’s leadership. Korah, like Miriam and Aaron, got critical of Moses and Aaron. Psalm 106:16 states he and the others were motivated by envy of Moses and Aaron.

You know, sometimes leadership doesn’t do things just the way we think things should be done. Maybe we think, “That’s a stupid thing to do!” or “Why in the world did Teacher say that?” or “It just isn’t fair for me to be treated like—.” We need to remember that “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1).

#### ***The complaint’s spreading***

Korah’s rebellion got a huge following! He had influenced a great “number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men.” The main leaders among the Reubenites leading the rebellion were Dathan, Abiram, and On. These three were truly insolent: they didn’t even come to Moses when the others did to rail against Moses and Aaron.

### ***The accusation***

Korah and his crowd said to Moses and Aaron, “*You have gone too far!* Everyone in the congregation is *holy*, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

### ***The test***

When Moses heard this, he did what he usually did in these situations—fell on his face. He announced to Korah and crowd, “In the morning the Lord will show who is his and who is *holy*. Korah, you and all your friends, do this: take censers, put fire in them, put incense on the fire, and bring them before the Lord tomorrow. The Lord will reveal those whom He chooses. *You have gone too far, sons of Levi!*”

“Furthermore,” continued Moses, “is it too small a thing that God has separated you from the rest of the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself as you serve in the Tabernacle and minister to the congregation? Do you want to be priests also? It is against the Lord that you all have gathered together. Now, go tell Dathan and Abiram to come here.”

### ***Dathan and Abiram’s response***

But when the message came to Dathan and Abiram (we read no more of On), they were so contemptuous that they refused to come to Moses. Instead, they sent a snotty message: “We will not come up. Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey” (they were talking about Egypt!) “to kill us in the wilderness?”

Now, was Moses going to kill them in the wilderness? No. God had said they would all die because *they* had not believed Him. In so doing, they had despised the Lord and deserved to die.

Dathan and Abiram berated Moses by charging, “It wasn’t enough for you to bring us out of an abundant country, but you have also made yourself a prince over us.” What distorted lies these men told. Who had made Moses a “prince” over them? God.

Dathan and Abiram had more to say. “You have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey nor given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. ✓Even if you put out the eyes of these men or punish us some other way, we will not come up” (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/numbers-16-14.html>).

### ***The censers***

Oooooo! Who did these guys think they were? Even meek Moses was angry! First, he said to the Lord, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed one of them.” Then he said to Korah and the others, “Just be present, you and all your company, with Aaron before the Lord tomorrow. Let every one of you take his censer and put incense on its fire, and bring them before the Lord—250 censers. Aaron will come with his censer.”

✓These rebels had that night to reconsider, but did they? No. The next morning they prepared their censers and stood at the entrance to the tent of meeting with the whole congregation, for, you see, Korah had assembled them all against Moses and Aaron.

### ***God’s response***

Oh, no! What would God do? The glory of the Lord appeared to the congregation, and God spoke to Moses. To whom? To Korah? To the 250 chiefs? No. To Moses and to Aaron, His chosen ones. This is what God said: “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.”

Always interceding, Moses and Aaron did what they usually did at such an announcement of judgment; they fell on their faces. Again they pled with God for the people, saying, “O God, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?”

The Lord answered, “Tell the congregation, ‘Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’”

Dathan and Abiram hadn't come before the Tabernacle as God had commanded that day either; so Moses went to them with the elders of Israel following him. When they arrived at the tents, Moses announced to the congregation, "Please get away from the tents of these wicked men. Touch nothing of theirs, or you will be swept away with all their sins."

So the people got themselves away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. These three rebels came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives and children.

### ***The consequences***

Moses said, "Now you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works and that it has not been of my self-will. If these men die in a way seen before, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol (Hell), then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord."

As soon as Moses stopped speaking, the ground under those wicked ones split apart, and the earth opened, swallowing up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram with all their families, except the sons of Korah (Numbers 26:11).<sup>\*</sup> All their belongings sank with their owners into the sand. Where there had been a hole, the earth closed over them. Those rebels perished in a way never before seen. God proved He had sent Moses to be His leader and "to do all these works."

What would you have done if you had been close to this incident and had seen this terrible death scene? Probably, you would have run. That's what the people did. All Israel who were around the sinkhole full of dead rebels ran at their death cry, for they said, "Let's get out of here so that the earth doesn't swallow us up!"

Then the Lord dealt with those 250 men who had offered their own incense. Fire came out from the Lord and consumed them all. God told Moses, "Have Eleazar, Aaron's son, gather the censers from the blaze. Then scatter their fire far and wide, for they have become holy. As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, hammer them into plates to cover the bronze altar. They offered incense before the Lord, and the censers became holy."

So that's what Eleazar the priest did. The bronze plates on the altar would, from that time forward, remind the people of Israel every time they offered sacrifices that only the descendants of Aaron could burn incense before the Lord. If an outsider would try to bring incense, he would become like Korah and his friends.

### ***The aftermath***

What a somber story! Surely the Israelites learned a lesson from this experience. I wish it were so, but on *the very next day* all the people of Israel again grumbled against Moses and Aaron. What they said was reminiscent of what Korah had said: "*All in the congregation are holy*, every one of them, and the Lord is among them." On this morning the people added this accusation, "You have killed the people of the Lord."

"People of the Lord"? They were rebels against the Lord! Oh, how deceived people can be!

### ***God's response***

The congregation turned toward the tent of meeting. God's cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, and the Lord spoke to Moses: "Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

### ***The plague***

Moses and Aaron—you say it—"fell on their faces." But this time they had no time to plead with God, for He had already started to destroy the people with a plague. Moses said to Aaron, "Quick! Take your censer, put fire from the altar in it, lay incense on the fire, and carry it to the congregation to make atonement for them. Wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun."

So Aaron did as Moses said and ran into the middle of the assembly and stood between the dead and the

living. The plague was stopped. Those who had died were 14,700 besides Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and the 250 chiefs. [Teacher, compare the number to the population of a city near you.] That’s about double the whole population of Lamar, Colorado. The reduction of unbelieving Israel had begun.

What does this event tell us about God’s attitude toward those who are disrespectful of the authority God has placed over them? [He hates such disrespect.]

### *The staffs*

God did one more thing ✓to establish His authority before the people. He said to Moses, “Get staffs from each tribe—twelve staffs. [Show the walking stick you have brought.] Write each man’s name on his staff, and write Aaron’s name on the staff for the tribe of Levi. Put the staffs in the tent of meeting before the ark of the covenant. The staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout: that dead stick will start to grow leaves. Thus, I will confirm once and for all the person I have chosen and stop all the grumblings of the people of Israel.”

The chief leader of each tribe brought a staff with his name on it. Who brought one for the tribe of Levi? [Aaron.] Moses took all the rods into the holy of holies in the Tabernacle and placed them before the ark of the covenant.

Can a dead stick sprout leaves? Can this dead walking stick grow blossoms? God is about to work a miracle.

The next day Moses went into the holy of holies again and collected all those staffs. He brought them out for the people to inspect. I’m sure you can tell whose staff sprouted leaves. Of course, it was the staff of the man God had chosen—Aaron. God had said the staff of his chosen man would sprout leaves, but listen to what God made happen to Aaron’s staff: it sprouted all right, but it also produced flower buds, blossoms, and ripe almonds! All on one dead stick!

God said, “Put Aaron’s staff back before the ark of the covenant to be kept as a sign for the rebels to see that their grumblings against me shall cease, or they will die.”

Die? Yes, death was exactly what worried the people. They said to Moses, “Behold, we perish, we are all undone. Everyone who comes near to the Tabernacle of the Lord, shall die. Are we all to perish?”

After all their rebellion, they did well to worry about dying. But once again, God was gracious and did not immediately slay all of these people.

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\*The Bible states the “sons and little ones” of Dathan and Abiram stood with them at the door of their tents (Numbers 16:27). Therefore, we know children perished in the pit with their parents. How do we address this difficult question? First, we tell our students that God is a good God and does all things well. We trust Him to do right even when we do not understand why or how He is working as He does. Second, the innocent often suffer because of the parents. For example, a baby in the womb dies by abortion because of a mother’s self-interest; children die in car crashes when a parent drives drunk. We must trust God’s wisdom in all things.

### **Lessons from this lesson:**

- We see Jesus:

When Jesus, a greater prophet than either Moses or Aaron, came to earth, God provided abundant evidence that He was chosen by God (Ganz).

Just as some of the Israelites rejected God’s choice of leaders over them, so wicked people rebelled in the parable about Jesus, saying, “We will not have this man to rule over us” (Luke 19:14).

One day Jesus will visibly rule over the whole world.

- Be careful to obey parents, teachers, and all others in authority. God has placed them there. If you resist, you are rebelling against—whom? God.

## Activities:

- Play dough: tents, censers, staffs
- Snack: Almonds.
- Taking all precautions against starting a fire, burn incense.
- Present and discuss the following: What commandment covers respect for authority? The fifth: Honor your father and your mother. What does the fifth commandment teach us? [To love and obey our parents and teachers.] Not just parents but all in authority unless they tell us to do something that God forbids.

What does God's punishment of Korah, Dathan, Abiram; the 250 chiefs; and the people killed in the plague tell us about what God thinks about disobeying parents and/or teachers? It is a very serious sin! We need to think of this sin as God thinks of it.

The following scenarios are true accounts. When teachers lead their classes, some children show their disrespect for authority by doing some of the following things:

- Crawl under a table and say, "I don't want to sit in my seat; I want to sit here"
- Sing and talk loudly while the teacher is giving instructions
- Get up and leave the room without permission
- Close his or her eyes and say, "Don't tell that story! I'm not listening!"

If you have done things like this, what should you do? You should confess your sins to God and apologize to your teacher or other authority you have wronged. A good way to do this is to say, "I was wrong to \_\_\_\_\_. Will you please forgive me?"

- Allow students to walk with the walking stick.
- Review questions: (Game: The student who answers a question correctly eats an almond. Or if the teacher has twelve flannelgraph rods, let students put one on the flannel board for each correct answer.)
  1. From what tribe and sub-tribe was Korah? [Levi; Kohath.]
  2. Name two of the three men of Reuben whom Korah influenced to rebel against Moses and Aaron? [Dathan, Abiram, On.]
  3. What was Korah's charge against Moses and Aaron? ["All in the congregation are holy, and the Lord is among them. Why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"]
  4. What were Korah and the 250 rebellious chiefs to bring to the Tabernacle? [Each was to bring a cens++er with fire and incense.]
  5. Who refused to come to the Tabernacle? [Dathan and Abiram.]
  6. What was one disrespectful thing Dathan and Abiram said to Moses? ["You brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey; you will kill us in the wilderness; you made yourself a prince over us; you haven't given us the land."]
  7. What was the thing, never done before, that would prove the Lord had sent Moses? [The ground would open its mouth and swallow up the rebels.]
  8. What happened to the 250 men with censers? [Fire came out from the Lord and consumed them.]
  9. Since the fire and incense in the censers was now holy, what did God tell Aaron to do with the censers? [To scatter the fire and to hammer out the bronze as a covering for the altar to remind the people of Israel that no one except the descendants of Aaron should burn incense before the Lord.]
  10. What happened on the next day when the people said, "You have killed the people of the Lord"? [God sent a plague that killed 14,700.]
  11. What happened to Aaron's staff? [It sprouted, had flower buds, blossoms, and almonds.]
  12. Where was Aaron's staff placed? [Before the ark of the covenant.]

## Memory Verse[s]:

- Exodus 20:1–17. An enlarged copy of the words, the “Exodus 20:1–17” song sheet, and motions are in Lesson 12.15 or on the “Lessons” and “Songs” pages at [teachingthebibletochildren.org](http://teachingthebibletochildren.org). “Stop! It’s the Law,” a song that teaches only the basic Ten Commandments, is found on the same “Songs” page.

**Handwork:**

- See <https://bibleclasscreations.blogspot.com/search/label/Aaron%27s%20Rod%20that%20Buds> for a video to show how to use a “magic window.” Another way to make the “window” is to tape with double-sided tape a ½ x 9-inch strip of brown paper or card stock exactly at the vertical midpoint on both sides of a sheet protector. (An option is to draw the brown staff using a permanent brown marker.)

Print the leaf-, bud-, blossom-, and almond-picture found below. Insert this page into the sheet protector. Insert a page of cardstock over the printed page and another on the back side. Pull out first one and then the other cardstock to find Aaron’s rod. Visit the above site to see other uses of this window.

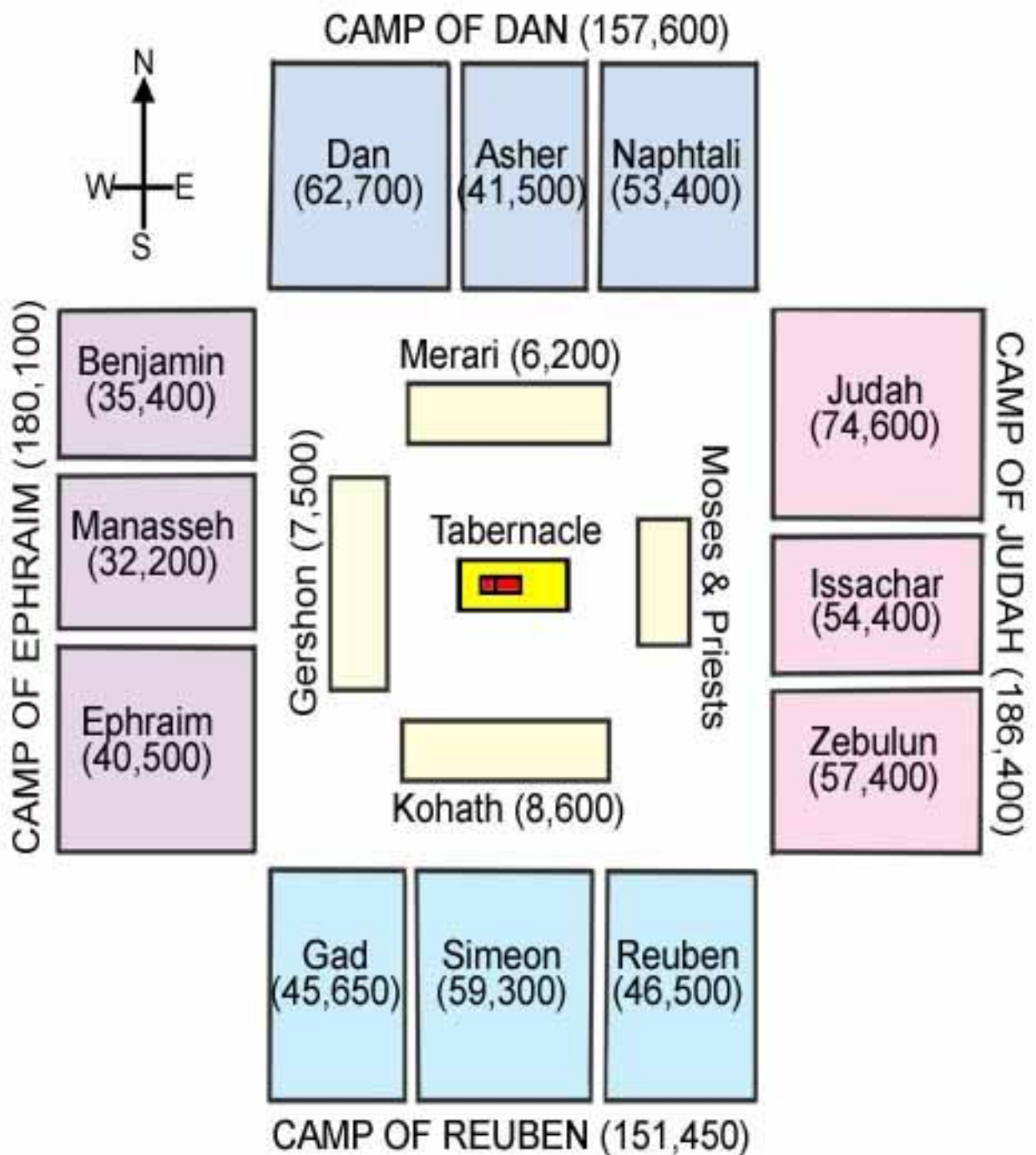


envy/jealousy

insolent

censer

plague



# Arrangement of the Camp of Israel

## Numbers 2:1-3:39

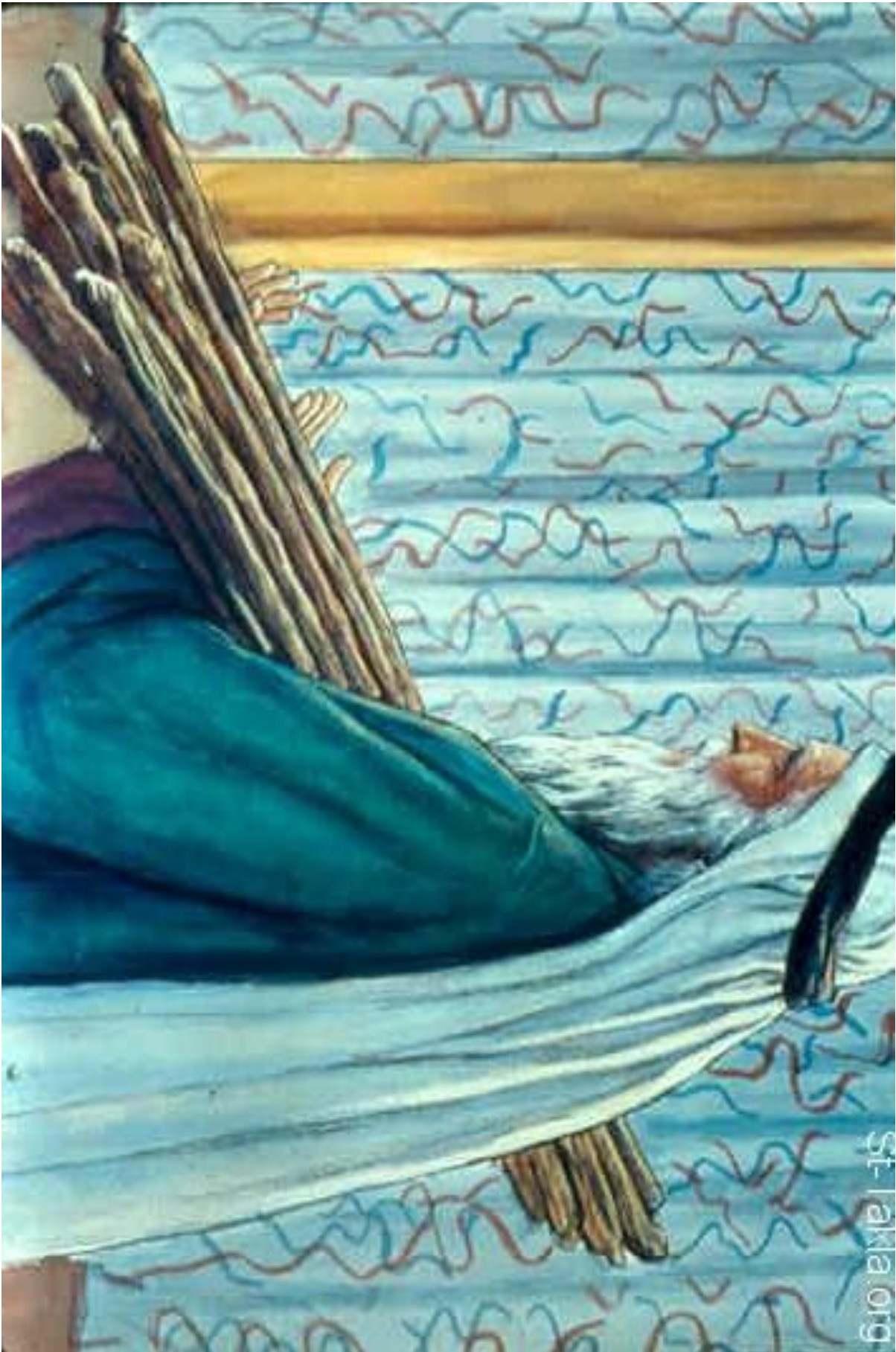


<https://www.biblia-es.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Rebeli3n-de-Cor3-Historias-Biblicas-min.jpg>











St-Takla.org





<http://www.christianlandmark.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/censerofAaron.jpg>



<https://safeguardingtheeternal.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/aarons-staff.jpg>

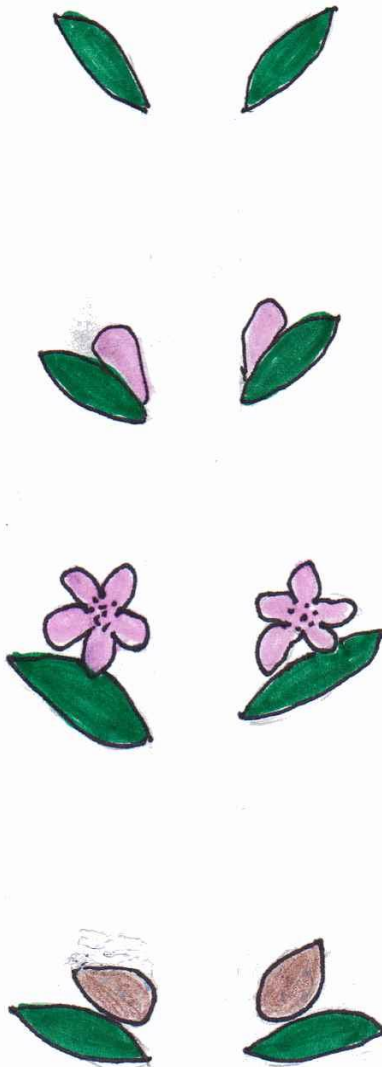
**“The staff of  
Aaron . . .**

**sprouted and**

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**produced  
blossoms,**

**and it bore  
ripe  
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**God said,  
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**Numbers 17:10.**