

HEROIC LEADERSHIP IN THE WILDERNES, Part I

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1. Introduction

Although Pentecostalism is said to be a restorationist movement,¹ its weak biblical foundations² which opted for a proof-texting methodology,³ a long term baggage of dispensationalism⁴ and anti-

See Gary B. McGee, "Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Tongues as Evidence in the Book of Acts," in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism* (Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Press, 1991), 97-99; Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism* Volume 1-to 1941 (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1989) and Charles Nienkirchen, "Conflicting Visions of the Past: The Prophetic Use of History in the Early American Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements," in *Charismatic Community as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1994), 120-125. Repristinationism is another term that may be used to describe the movement and its application of biblical truth.

² Typology was a major source for biblical interpretation. See J. Robert Ashcroft, *Ways of Understanding God's Words* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1960), 69-73.

³ The classic proof-texting example in Pentecostal writing is Carl Brumback, *"What Meaneth This?": A Pentecostal Answer to a Pentecostal Question* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1947).

⁴ See for example Frank M. Boyd, *Ages and Dispensations* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1955), and the use of both Larkin's works and Scofield's Bible. Also Gerald Shepherd's important article: "Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: An Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship," *Pneuma*, Volume 6:2 (Fall 1984), 5-34.

intellectualism⁵ has caused us to flirt with many cultural fads and theological obscurantism. The most recent fad is the study of leadership in the church and parachurch. The problem that I perceive is not the field itself, although others may question its cross-cultural applicability or credibility from the perspectives of business education or the behavior sciences. My issue is that a lack of in-depth biblical and theological ground tilling has occurred in this field. In the following two-part essay, I would like to at least make one furrow and thereby prepare the soil for others to plant. I will plow in the Pentateuch, focusing especially on the book of Numbers. I will also give a summary-application at the conclusion of the second essay.

The book of Numbers, at first blush, depicts a tribal based extended family that has been given a cultic and military order. However, its social and religious development is a far cry from a neat and orderly world. Chapter 1 quickly clusters the Israelites into clans (לפספסוחם) and ancestral houses (לביית אבהם) that form an elite group of chosen (Q, קרואי) leaders who assist (אשר יעמורו אחכם) Moses and Aaron in enlisting⁶ the

⁵ It is important to remember that one of the major architects of Pentecostal theology was Ernest S. Williams, president of Assemblies of God, U.S.A.'s most prestigious Bible school, Central Bible Institute in the years 1929-1931 and again between 1939-1948, had only a eighth grade education. See Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School 1880-1940* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), 13. Recent Russell Spittler has as stated "Abiding anti-intellectualism is one of our flaws. In the Assemblies of God, when you apply annually for credentials, you have to identify your ministry: pastor, chaplain, missionary, evangelist, other. For years, I had to check "other." I was always an "other" because a teacher is not highly respected [so it's not on the list]. If the Holy Spirit is teaching you, why would you have any regard for this or that teacher? There's a kind of theological independence that scoffs at education. Yet you can't do theology without intellect. You can't." in Madison Trammel and Rob Moll, "Three leaders talk frankly about Pentecostalism: grading the movement: the good, bad, and the unpredictable," *Christianity Today* 50, no. 4 (2006), 41. See also Roger Olson, "Pentecostalism's Dark Side," *Christian Century* 123, no. 5 (2006), 27, where he writes, "endemic to Pentecostalism is a profoundly anti-intellectual ethos. It is manifested in a deep suspicion of scholars and educators and especially biblical scholars and theologians."

⁶ Rolf Knierim and George Coats argues that chapter 1 is, "a REPORT about a society-wide military CONSCRIPTION." Rolf P. Knierim and George W. Coats, *Numbers, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, Volumes IV* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 52-3.

burgeoning⁷ recruits. Only the tribe of Levi is exempt from this military conscription. To them fell the task of porters for the sacral accoutrements and when stationary, to guard (בשמירה) the sacred precincts. All this is coordinated with a prearranged trumpeted series of signals to systematize the bivouacking.⁸ Beneath the façade of this perfectly symmetrical social architecture was an institutional quagmire that only a person of heroic propensity could possibly keep together. This is one of the major thematic trajectories that runs through the book of Numbers as Jeffrey Cohen articulates it, ". . . there is not one portion which does not provide us with some insight into the nature of Moses' leadership and the manifold challenges with which a leader has to contend."⁹

In the following synchronic study of the Masoretic Text of the book of Numbers, I would like to present a sketch of the infrastructure of the "congregation of the Israelites" (בני ישראל) and the exemplary leadership of the heroic Moses, who dealt with a leadership structure that at times was contentious and yet crucial in upholding a vision for a future generation.

2. The Congregation of the Israelites

The primary term that is used to describe the pre-monarchic Israel's social-political structure is עדה. Although קהל makes a few cameo

⁷ The large numbers have been dealt with extensively in commentaries and other scholarly literature. Some significant articles include: Eryl W. Davies, "A Mathematical Conundrum: The Problem of the Large Numbers in Numbers I and XXVI," *VT* 45:4 (1995), 449-469; Heinzerling, Riidiger. "Beleams Ratsel-Die Zählung der Wehrfähigen in Numeri 1 und 26." *ZAW* 111 (1999), 404-415; Heinzerling, Riidiger. "On the Interpretation of the Census Lists by C J Humphreys and G E Mendenhall." *VT* 50:2 (2000), 250-252; Humphreys, C. J. "The numbers of people in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding mathematically the every large numbers in Numbers I and xxvi." *VT* 48:2 (1998), 196-213; McEntire, M. "A response to Colin J. Humphreys's 'The number of people in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding mathematically the very large numbers in Numbers I and xxvi.'" *VT* 49 (1999), 262-264; Mendenhall, G. E. "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26." *JBL* 77 (1958) 52-66; Milgrom, J. "On decoding very large numbers." *VT* 49:1 (1999), 131-132; Wenham, J. W. "Large Numbers in the Old Testament." *TB* 18 (1967) 19-53.

⁸ Numbers 10.1-10.

⁹ Jeffrey M. Cohen, "Leadership in the Book of Numbers," *JBQ* 28, no. 2 (2000), 125.

appearances in the book of Numbers,¹⁰ it is ערה that dominates." Thorkild Jacobsen set the stage for the modern discussion of ערה when he drafted the early scenario of democracy. His stance was that the day to day activities of the primitive states were handled by elders, but at pivotal crises, it was a "provisional and ad hoc"¹² gathering of the people, an assembly, that dealt with the problem." In a later study, Jacobsen analyzes the *Enûma Eliš* with an eye toward a social-political analysis. He makes note of continual political inconsistencies that ultimately bring about crises. Jacobsen writes,

In this conflict stages of progressively greater concentration and permanence of power arise one out of the other: virtual anarchy and private war give way to primitive democracy with an ad hoc leader, the king, chosen in the general assembly when common danger imposes unanimity and concerted action, and this in turn resolves into permanent monarchy with its promise of administrative benefits far beyond merely temporary safety of life and property.¹⁴

The above analysis could well be applied to the biblical history of Israel, in which a post-Judges era would produce a cry for a change from primitive democracy under Samuel and others to a monarchical society. The complexities in both the developing monarchic era and the fully

¹⁰ See Num 14.5, 16.3 and 20.4. It is noteworthy that the קהל is found in negative contexts with all of these verses.

¹¹ See Num 1.2, 16, 18, 53; 3.7; 4.34; 8.9, 20; 10.2, 3; 13.26; 14.1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 27, 35, 36; 15.24, 25, 26, 33, 35, 36; 16.2, 5, 6, 9, 11, 16, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26; 17.5, 6, 7, 10, 11; 19.9; 20.1, 2, 8, 11, 22, 27, 29; 25.6, 7; 26.2, 9, 10; 27.2, 3, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22; 27, 2, 3, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22; 31.12, 13, 16, 26, 27, 43; 32.2, 4; 35.12, 24, 25.

¹² Thorkild Jacobsen, "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia," *ZA* 18 (1957), 104; Quoted in Jacob Milgrom, "Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel," *JQR*, 69 (1978), 66. See also Jacobsen's earlier article, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *JNES* 2 (1943).

¹³ A challenging alternative view on the birth and development of democracy, with the ancient Athenians as the originators is presented in Paul Woodruff, *First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 170.

matured dynastic kingdom of Judah are quite different from that portrayed in the book of Numbers.¹⁵ Here in Numbers the primitive democracy expressed by the ערה is maintained under the watchful eyes of Moses.

The usage of ערה, as analyzed by Jacob Milgrom, follows the standard Ancient Near Eastern pattern as depicted by Jacobsen and others. Milgrom writes concerning the biblical perspective in the pre-monarchic era:

In sum, the מו can only be conceived as an ad hoc emergency body called together by the tribal chieftains whenever a national trans-tribal issue arose. However, once the monarchy was firmly established, there was no further use of the מו and it disappears. Thus the phenomenon of the sporadic assembly of the pre-monarchic city-state described by Jacobsen for ancient Mesopotamia, though separated from Israel by vast stretches of time and space, is *mutatis mutandis* duplicated by the history and function of the Biblical ערה.¹⁶

Earlier in his study, Milgrom also indicated that "the ערה can be equivalent to all the Israelites, to the adult males, or to their national representatives."¹⁷ The "all Israelites" often included both women and children along with men of all ages. In the book of Numbers this full range is evident.

Due to the ad hoc nature of the ערה, the texts cluster around major turning points and leadership struggles. For example the use of ערה in Num 13.26; 14.1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 27, 35, 36 clusters around the scout report and the response, not of the general populous which would have been expressed by the phrase בני ישראל alone¹⁸ or some combination with עם,

¹⁵ A biblical perspective on leadership needs to work through the different social-political contexts that are present in the different texts, before one can say that they have established a biblical view/s. Needless to say this study cannot deal with these other layers and it would potentially be another area of future study.

¹⁶ Milgrom, "Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel," 75.

¹⁷ Milgrom, "Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel," 70.

¹⁸ Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 130, differentiates the two terms and defines the בני ישראל as "a more widely used ethnographic designation in which *bēn* 'son' functions to express group affiliation."

but the ערה. The ערה here, differentiates this crisis event from those in chapter 11 (11.1-3, העם; 11.4-35, והאספסף¹⁹ and בני ישראל), where the organized opposition against Moses and divine guidance is illegitimate and spontaneous or charismatic without the sanction of the "primitive democratic" system. Chapter 13.25-14.45 on the other hand, begins with the legitimate gathering of the legal body for such occasions, that is the ערה, along with Moses and Aaron. There would have been greater symmetry in this pericope if the scouts had returned to Moses first, however the discontinuity may be intended to accentuate the intensity of the rebellion (14.9, מרד¹⁹) of the legitimate legal assembly.

It would seem that a valid study of leadership in the book of Numbers, necessitates an awareness of the role of the ערה before applying a characterized and synthetic picture of leadership as represented in the life of Moses.

Furthermore, the catalogue of technical terms dealing with social stratification needs to at least be mentioned. The book of Numbers as well as other pre-monarchic biblical texts refer to the following: "tribe (שבט) ⇔ clan (משפחה) ⇔ household (בית) ⇔ individual (גבר)."²⁰ Both the words for "tribe" and "clan" have parallel terms: שבט for משה and אלף for משפחה, with the phrase "בית אבות" also meaning "clan." Valid leaders within specified spheres of influence are indicated by each of these social stratification terms. A full differentiation cannot be accomplished in this paper. Instead the tribal leader or "chieftain" will be investigated next.

3. Tribal Leaders

Leadership in the book of Numbers is not vested in just crisis based assemblies, nor monopolized by Moses or even a Moses-Aaron-Miriam triumvirate. It is a rich and variegated hierarchy that is both institutional and charismatic, legitimate and at times illegitimate. The tribal leadership infrastructure was both institutional and legitimate. The words that depict

¹⁹ The אספסף is probably an example of a charismatic and illegitimate leadership. Contrary to the Septuagintal reading which identifies this group with those in Exod 12.38, the זון and the מ use a unique term here. As Levine, *Numbers* 1-20: *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 102, indicates it is a reduplicated form of אסף which generally translates into "to gather in." Levine implies the possibility that אסף may indicate the gathering of "fighting forces" and therefore the text is dealing with a military-junta like coup d'état.

²⁰ Milgrom, "Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel," 79.

this general level of leadership in the book of Numbers include: ערה, nan, אלף, בית אבות / אלף, נשיא and ראש. These words are combined, recombined and nuanced throughout the book. Some of the pericopes can be clustered, while others remain orphaned.

The two terms נשיא and ראש may be used in contrast to the designation זקן. In the book of Numbers זקן is used to indicate "a national body comprised of seventy elders acting as a council."²¹ While נשיא and ראש tend to be used interchangeably with a "slight difference between the two terms, not in substance but in syntax: ראש is generally used when referring to the leader's office within a clan, whereas נשיא will refer to his office vis-à-vis his tribe."²² On the other hand, ראש according to J. R. Bartlett's study was used in early pericopes "in a tribal context of men exercising leadership in military and judicial matters."²³ Speiser studied the early usage of נשיא and concluded that "a nāšī' was someone elected to that position by the appropriate council,"²⁴ thereby emphasizing the office's representative role.

The first block of leaders designated as נשיא and ראש, that we can cluster, are those that are repeated by name in 1.4-15, 2.3-31, 7.12-83 and 10.14-27. Their names are for the most part unique to these pericopes²⁵ and show signs of great antiquity,²⁶ due to the lack of the

²¹ Moshe Weinfeld, "Judge and Officer in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East," *IOS* 7 (1977), 65. Conrad, "זקן zāqēn; זקן zōqēn; זקנה ziqniūh; זקנים zē qunūm," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Volume IV, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 123. writes, "The elder is . . . a member of a special committee representing a specific, clearly defined social community; he must be thought of primarily as the holder of an office, not the representative of a particular age group."

²² Milgrom, "Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel," 80.

²³ J. R. Bartlett, "The use of the word ראש as a title in the Old Testament," *V/T* 19, no. 1 (1969), 1.

²⁴ E. A. Speiser, "Background and Function of the Biblical Nāšī'," *CBQ* 25, no. 1 (1963), 114.

²⁵ Only Naḥshon and 'Arminadab are repeated in the biblical traditions. See George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903), 6.

²⁶ See Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 53-4 and Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 69.

Tetragrammaton as a theophanic element in their names. Their specific tasks include: 1) assisting Moses and Aaron (אשר יעמדו אתכם, 1.5aβ) in the census taking (שאו את־ראש, 1.2a) and in fact they were in charge of the conscription (הם העמדים על־הפקדים, 7.2b); 2) stationing themselves among their respective camps (דגל מנה, 2.3aβ) which would be the basis for the decampment and bivouac (2.34); 3) offering a series of gifts and dedicatory offerings (לחנכת, 7.11b); 4) commanding the tribes as they were to move out (ועל־עבאי, 10.14b).

The first task hints at a hierarchical infrastructure in which these tribal leaders are subservient to Moses and Aaron as they fulfill the divine command to take a census. This may be argued from the use of the preposition *nu* along with the verb עמד.²⁷ However, the fact that 7.2b describes these same tribal leaders as being in charge²⁸ of the census process mitigates their subservience. Instead a fully delegated process is indicated. This is crucial since the census taking plays a significant role in chapters 1-4 and 26 and therefore providing an important stitching in the fabric of the book of Numbers. Following the studies of E. A. Speiser on the use of census in Mari and its application to ancient Israel,²⁹ Benjamin E. Scolnic identified the purpose of this census as military. Furthermore, "records are the goal, so carefully-gathered lists are essential. The lists are created by place names and personal names in Mari, and by tribal (or clan) names and personal names in Israel."³⁰ Scolnic, combines Speiser's studies with the insights of Jean Robert Kupper and adds a purificatory role to the census.³¹ He writes, "there is something about a census, at least as described by Ex 30:12, which requires an expiatory ritual or monetary payment for assurance that there

²⁷ See Genesis 45.1 which refers to Joseph's attendants.

²⁸ Here the preposition על is crucial. Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 254, writes, ". . . characterizing the twelve chieftain as 'the ones in charge of the musters,' literally, 'who stand over (*hā'ōmedim 'al*) the musters," recalls Num 1:5, 'āšer ya'amdū 'itkem, literally, 'who shall stand with you.'

²⁹ Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, "Census and Ritual expiation in Mari and Israel," in *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, ed. Jacob J. Finkelstein and Moseh Greenberg (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania, 1967), 171-186.

³⁰ Benjamin Edidin Scolnic, *Theme and Context in Biblical Lists*, Studies in the History of Judaism, No. 119 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 59.

³¹ Scolnic, *Theme and Context in Biblical Lists*, 59.

will be no plague."³² The redemption principle in Num 3.40-51 may be viewed as functioning in a similar manner. If this line of reasoning can be sustained, the tribal leaders may have had an apotropaic function.

The tribal leaders' military function is further witnessed in the second and fourth tasks enumerated above. The orderliness in the encampment and militaristic advancement is depicted as within the parameters of their responsibilities. It is possible to link these passages to 10.1-13, which precedes the last pericope in this cluster. Here, the two silver trumpets call the tribal leadership together in 10.4 (אליך הנשיאים ראשי אלפי ישראל) and then spell out the order of decampment according to the blast.³³

The appearance of the tribal leaders in the narrative context that chapter 7 establishes is paradigmatic. As Eryl W. Davies indicates, "there can be little doubt that the object of its inclusion was to emphasize the unstinting generosity of the tribal leaders of old. . ."³⁴ a role model for future generations. The leadership role of these chieftains is obviously beyond the *Zählgehilfen* rubric that Kellermann subsumes them under.³⁵

Numbers 1.16 is an important verse for understanding this tribal leadership. It reads:

אלה (קרואי, Q) קריאי העדה	These were called ones of the congregation
נשיאי משוח אבותם	the leaders of their ancestral tribes,
ראשי אלפי ישראל הם	the heads of the divisions of Israel.

Both the Qere reading (קרואי, Qal passive participle) and the Kethib reading (קריאי, masculine plural adjective) may be understood as passive.³⁶ So readings such as "those called" or "elected" of the community may be contrasted with a leadership role that would be under

³² Scolnic, *Theme and Context in Biblical Lists*, 59.

³³ See my paper "An Introduction and Experiment in Pluriform Textual Studies: Numbers 10.1-10ff." for a comparison of the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuchal texts. The paper can be downloaded from <http://hebrewscriptsandmore.com/APTS-Subpages/BOT640/Documents/Numbers-10-AnExperiment.pdf>

³⁴ Eryl W. Davies, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Numbers* (London & Grand Rapids: Marshall Pickering & Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 70.

³⁵ Diether Kellermann, *Die Priesterschrift von Numeri 1.1 bis 10.10* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970), 6-7.

³⁶ Kellermann, *Die Priesterschrift von Numeri 1.1 bis 10.10*, 6. "Die Form קריאי kann sowohl aktiven wie passiven Sinn haben. . . ."

the direct appointment of Moses and/or Aaron. If this is the case, then the 250 Israelite leaders that rose up against Moses and Aaron in Num 16.1-4 and Dathan and Abiram (26.9) were of the same elected status, i.e., legitimate leaders. Needless to say then, the 12 in chapters 1, 2, 7 and 10 were only a small portion of the larger leadership infrastructure in the tribes. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the leader does not guarantee proper submission to divine guidance.

The most dramatic example of legitimate institutional leadership failure can be seen in the scout narrative of chapters 13-14.³⁷ Here, in the typical Mosaic pattern of obedience, Moses follows YHWH's command to send men out to scout the land which was to be given to בני ישראל (13.2, 3). Each was to be a tribal leader (13.2ב כל נשיא; 13.3ב כלם אנשים ראשי בני ישראל), so they were legitimate institutional leaders. In fact, parodying the named chieftains of chapters 1, 2, 7, and 10, they are individually named. With the exception of Joshua, which the narrator indicates as an altered name, the chieftains do not have the theophanic Tetragrammaton in their names. Also, the list begins with Reuben like Num 1 and 26, in contrast to Num 2, 7, 10 and 34 which begins with Judah.³⁸ As tribal leaders they could call for the עדה to assemble to meet in the primitive democratic mode. However, the result was failure due to their covenant unfaithfulness in the form of rebellion.³⁹ The Masoretic Text expresses the words of rebellion as: "We are not able to go up against the people, for it is (they are) stronger than us." (13.31) It is interesting to note that Jewish scholars from the medieval period had found the unpointed text as indicating an even greater level of rebellion. The comparative preposition and its suffix had been pointed to read: ממנו which is a 1st person plural, i.e., "than us." However, in an unpointed text the same consonants could be read as "than he." Rashi writes, "They said

³⁷ Scout narratives have a comparable narrative pattern that is helpful in analyzing the texts. See A. Malamat, "The Danite Migration and the Pan-Israelite Exodus-Conquest: A Biblical Narrative Pattern," *Biblica* 51 (1970), 1-16 and Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 390-91.

³⁸ Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 352.

³⁹ Norbert Lohfink, "Original Sins in the Priestly Historical Narratives," in *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 110-12, indicates that the sins of the political leaders of Israel in the P-source was to lead the entire community of Israel into slandering of the land.

this, - if this were at all possible, i.e., if one may be permitted to say so of God - with reference to the Omnipresent ממנו, stronger than "He"; they thus uttered blasphemy."⁴⁰

Numbers 14.4 continues the depth of the paradox, by having the members of the עדה suggest the choosing of another ראש and heading back to Egypt. Once again, a legitimate action by the ad hoc assembly, however the special, atypical status of Moses⁴¹ was not recognized, nor was "majority rule" the answer to the "rejection" of YHWH (14.1 lap, ער- וער-אנה and their "not believing" in YHWH (14.11ba, לא-יאמינו כי). It is interesting to note that the forgiveness that Moses attempts to gain is not for the עדה or the unfaithful chieftains, but for the עם. Even after forgiveness is extended to the עם, the עדה is under judgment as can be seen in 14.27, 35 and 36, while the unfaithful tribal leaders "who caused" the עדה to complain against him," died unceremoniously by a plague.

The leadership infrastructure of the book of Numbers therefore implies a vast pyramid of responsibilities and spheres of authority whereby tasks are truly delegated. On the other hand, these chieftains/tribal leaders may err or even participate in sedition against Moses and/or Aaron, along with a rejection of divine fidelity. It should be noted that both the עדה and tribal leaders who were legitimate within the social-political infrastructure of the pre-monarchic community were immediately judged over against the forgiveness offered to the עם.

4. Elders & the 70 Elders of Moses

The elder system is another component within the hierarchical infrastructure of the pre-monarchic community of Israel depicted in the book of Numbers. Although the noun זקן may derive from the word "beard"⁴³ and "a third of the occurrences has the meaning" old. . . . Most often by far the noun *zāqēn* is used in the specialized sense of "elder."⁴⁴ Hanoch Reviv has compared the terms ראש/ראשים and זקן/זקנים and

⁴⁰ M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silbennann, ed. *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary translated into English and Annotated: Numbers* (Jerusalem: The Silberman Family, 1973), 65.

⁴¹ See Numbers 12.6-8 and the discussion below.

⁴² Reading the Qere which is a causative (Hiphil), ויליט

⁴³ Conrad, "זָקֵן *zāqēn*; זָקֵן *zōqēn*; זִקְנָה *ziqnāh*; זָקֵן *zāqēn*," 122.

⁴⁴ Conrad, "זָקֵן *zāqēn*; זָקֵן *zōqēn*; זִקְנָה *ziqnāh*; זָקֵן *zāqēn*," 123.

established an important clarification of terms, especially in Numbers and Chronicles.

... "heads" were the leaders (the "elders") at the sub-tribal and settlement levels, or parallel to the "chiefs" at the tribal level. However, the "elders are invariably second in rank to the "head" in the sense of "chief", when these terms are both mentioned in a particular context. Consideration of the titles assigned to the "chiefs", in the sense of tribal heads, such as "heads of fathers", "heads of fathers' houses", "heads of the people of Israel", implies that the individual tribal chiefs came from the ranks of the elders.⁴⁵

Earlier in his study, Reviv adds another important insight, that in the זקן/ראש relationship, the term ראש is used in the Bible when referring to an individual member of the institution of the "elders", in place of "elder" (זקן), which is not used in this sense in the singular form.⁴⁶ This may very well mean that the social-political authority of the sub-tribal leadership is vested in the collective "elders" rather than the individual "elder." It is only the individual elder who has been singled out as a tribal leader/chieftain that has authority individually.

A case of collective sub-tribal eldership activity is seen in the interesting Zelophehad's daughters hearings (27.1-11; 36.1-12). The difficult judicial ruling concerning the property rights of the daughters of Zelophehad is deliberated before Moses, Eleazar the new priest, the tribal leadership (הגשׁיאים) and the whole עדה (27.2). The ruling comes via divine fiat in favor of the daughters. However, in Num 36.1 a sub-tribal elder (ראשי האבות למשפחה), in this case ראש is used with "clan" along with the term אבות to identify the elders. They then bring a counter-claim before Moses and the tribal leadership. Here, as is expected the eldership approaches as a collective and receives a hearing that mitigates the initial ruling.

The Pentateuch as a whole has several important sections that deal with eldership and its development: Exod 18.12-27; 24.1-11; Num 11.16-17, 24-30 and Deut 1.9-17. However, it is difficult to produce a consistent synthesis from these texts. Reviv bemoans that "the written sources are not homogeneous. There are difference of approach, argumentation, and background which reflect different conditions and

⁴⁵ Hanoch Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel: A Study of a Biblical Institution* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1989), 21.

⁴⁶ Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel: A Study of a Biblical Institution*, 15.

indicate different dates of composition."⁴⁷ Reviv in fact, concludes that the Exod 18.13-27 "reflects the time of David, prior to the rebellion of Absalom,"⁴⁸ Num 11.16-25 is "related to the establishment of high court in Jerusalem in the days of Jehoshaphat,"⁴⁹ while Deut 1.9-17 "suits the period of the reigns of Hezekiah or Josiah."⁵⁰ When attempts are made to present a unified picture of eldership in the Pentateuch, it is the fact that they do not seem to play an "independent role"⁵¹ that is significant. In fact the elders "are silent representatives of the people, who are summoned or instructed by Moses, or appear alongside him, without ever developing any independent initiative."⁵²

The interpretative quagmire may be simplified by first realizing that the numbers of elders were large, having naturally developed in the social infrastructure of the clan, a sub-tribal leadership. Even the idea of an "institution of a council of seventy attached to a ruler is well attested in the ancient Near East."⁵³ Passages such as Exod 4.29 and 12.21 indicated that the biblical tradition acknowledged the eldership strata of Israelite leadership before the above four pericopes. Secondly, the four pericopes may depict changes or special utilizations of the clan eldership.

Exod 18.22, for example, proposes that the elders who qualified could function as judges

⁴⁷ Hanach Reviv, "The Traditions Concerning the Inception of the Legal System in Israel: Significance and Dating," *ZAW* 94 (1982), 566. J. Buchholz, *Die Altesten Israels im Deuteronomium*, Göttingen Theologische Arbeiten, no. 36 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), argues that the phrase "elders of Israel" has its theological foundations in the Deuteronomic historians or Ezekiel.

⁴⁸ Reviv, "The Traditions Concerning the Inception of the Legal System in Israel: Significance and Dating," 575. R. Knierim, "Exodus 18 und die Neuordnung der mosaischen Gerichtsbarkeit," *ZAW* 73 (1961), 161-62 identified the Jehoshaphat period for Exod 18.

⁴⁹ Reviv, "The Traditions Concerning the Inception of the Legal System in Israel: Significance and Dating," 575.

⁵⁰ Reviv, "The Traditions Concerning the Inception of the Legal System in Israel: Significance and Dating," 575.

⁵¹ Conrad, "זקן *zāqēn*; זקן *zōqēn*; זקנה *ziqnāh*; זקנים *z'qunīm*," 129.

⁵² Conrad, "זקן *zāqēn*; זקן *zōqēn*; זקנה *ziqnāh*; זקנים *z'qunīm*," 129.

⁵³ Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*, 87.

feared God (יראי אלהים), were trustworthy men (אנשי נהו) and hated gain⁵⁵ (שנאי בצע). The men are then made to be rulers (שֹׁרֵטִים) with varying degrees of responsibility.⁵⁶ Pietro Bovati, focusing on the function and role of judges and their interrelationship with such terms as z'qēnîm, šārîm, and melek, etc., writes, "the role of the judge was not exercised indiscriminately by everybody, but rather by those recognized as having some authority (of government): in accordance with spheres of competence and in accordance with the historical evolution of (civil or military) political authority, jurisdiction belonged to different people."⁵⁷ Bovati also indicates that since there was a fundamental problem with a singularity of leadership, this problem was "solved by the creation of a *corps of judges* (Exod 18.22-26; Deut 1.16-17), which was not, however, a 'separate organ' endowed with autonomy within its sphere of competence, but rather an organic group of people to whom a measure of power was delegated for minor cases. The 'judges' were or became 'chiefs' in Israel; they were recognized as having received an authority that was also jurisdictional, in accordance with a well-defined hierarchical ladder."⁵⁸

Exod 24.1-11 depicts a different function that is more social-religious in nature (24.1b "worship at a distances" (והשתחויהם מרחק)). The chosen group are called "seventy from among the elders of Israel" (שבעים מזקני ישראל), which seems to lack specificity. The sacral meal (24.11), the vision of "the God of Israel" (24.10), along with the covenant rituals preformed by Moses are more central to this pericope.⁵⁹ There is

writes, "IS hayi can connote a warrior, a rich man or a citizen of deserved respect and social influence. While the last dominates here, the judges also require physical stamina and material prosperity."

⁵⁵ Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 632. "That is, immune to bribery because of their wealth."

⁵⁶ Jonathan Magonet, "The Korah Rebellion," *JSOT* 24 (1982), 8. Magonet give a summary of H. S. Nahmani's discussion concerning Moses' reinstatement the "elders" over the military and then their judiciary authority.

⁵⁷ Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series, no. 105, trans. Michael J. Smith (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 177.

⁵⁸ Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, 179-80.

⁵⁹ Shigehiro Nagano, "The Elders of Israel in Exodus 24.9-11," *AJBI* 19 (1993), 23-29. Nagano gives an extended discussion of three major themes in the

no indication that the seventy here are those who reappear in the narrative sequence of Numbers 11.16-30.⁶⁰ All in all this text seems to refer to another very different group of elders selected especially for this event that was strongly religious in function.

Num 11.16-30, the main "elders of Israel" passage in the book of Numbers, presents another different group of leaders with a specific role and function that differs from the preceding texts. I argue this in spite of the fact that there are many links between the two passages. Stephen L. Cook has given an extended list:

They share the motif of the burden of the people on Moses, which he cannot bear "alone" (Num 11:14, 17; Exod 18:18), the idea of a selection of leaders from among the people for the relief of Moses (Num 11:16; Exod 18:21, 25), the identical clause וְשָׂאוּ אִתָּךְ ("they will share your load"; Num 11:17; Exod 18:22), and a report that Moses carried out the recommended decentralization of his office (Num 11:24-25; Exod 18:27). . . .

Exod 18:13-27 and Num 11:14-30 must be connected. . . . Knierim's objection that Numbers 11 deals with prophetic, not judicial, issues does not carry weight. . . . Numbers 11 involves the reinforcement of the leadership role of lineage heads in Israel. It is specifically the people's "elders and officers" that are singled out to be Mosaic leaders (Num 11:16). And the leadership role of Israel's elders had a significant judicial component, which would be presupposed by the ancient hearers of Numbers. Thus, the tradition of Moses' relief through the appointment of Mosaic elders/judges should be accepted as a common thread linking Numbers 11 and Exodus 18, although the judicial aspect of the tradition was only stressed explicitly in the later text.⁶¹

passage, i.e., the covenant making meal, the vision of God in the theophany, and the festive worship of God.

⁶⁰ Nagano, "The Elders of Israel in Exodus 24.9-11," 18. Nagano attempts to connect Exod 24.9-11, Ezek 8.11 and Num 11.16ff in light of the 'seventy' elders. Although he, speculates about the term "seventy" being used as a symbolic representation of a "political ruling body," in the Old Testament, ultimately nothing can be definitively identified between the three texts.

⁶¹ Stephen L. Cook, "The Tradition of Mosaic Judges: Past Approaches and New Direction," in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winters (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 291.

Cook's observation concerning the motif of the burden sharing should probably be viewed as a strong point of contact between the two texts,⁶² however the tasks which the "elders of Israel" will preform seem to be quite different. The clear indication that in Exod 18 a judicial role is being played, while there is a complete absence of this in Num 11 is telling. Furthermore, in contrast to the rather specific qualifications of Exod 18.22, Num 11.16 only indicates that the helpers of Moses be known by Moses to be "elders of the people and their שְׂרָרִי. The latter qualification is an interpretative crux that is difficult to interpret. Baruch Levine gives the following standard background to the word:

In Hebrew usage, šōṭerîm are so called primarily because they issue written documents or actually write them. This definition emerges for the Akkadian cognate, šatāru 'to write,' as well as from Aramaic šetār 'written document'. A title similar to Hebrew šōṭēr does not, however, occur either in Akkadian or Aramaic, as far as we know. These same officials figure in the narratives of Exodus and in the laws of Deuteronomy. In 2 Chr 26.11, šōṭēr is synonymous with sōpēr 'scribe.'⁶³

Moshe Weinfeld capitalizes on this scribal aspect and offers the following as a contextualized function of such a group:

The functions of the šōṭēr attached to the judge may be clearly enumerated. The judge was certainly in need of a *secretary* for recording, a *constable* for executive-punitive measures, and a *messenger* or *attendant* for rendering service to the court. In ancient Egypt these functions are clearly illustrated on the wall-drawings: in a scene of the judgment hall, shown on the walls of the tomb of Rekhmire, vizier of Thutmosis III, we see rows of scribes on one side and an accused bring led by constables to the judgment on the other. Another scene depicts the accused brought before the court on the right side, and three men flogging the accused on the left.

⁶² Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, 110-11, argues that v. 17b is an editorial addition that secondarily attaches the present text to Exod 18. Once v. 17b is removed and along with v. 11-15 from the flow of 11.16ff. the connection that Cook argues for disappears. However, this level of textual manipulation is highly questionable.

⁶³ Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 323-24.

These functions are documented in texts from the New Egyptian Kingdom, and especially in those from Deir el Medineh. . . .⁶⁴

Although etymologically the "writing" or "scribal" aspect of the term is dominant, its biblical usage moves beyond a "record keeper." Koehler, Baumgartner and Stamm notes that "according to its usage and literary context it has the sense of civil servant, office holder, and in the plural officials, administrators."⁶⁵ It is especially the Exod 5.6, 10, 15, 15, 19 passages with the "foreman over the labour gangs"⁶⁶ that may be helpful here. Contextually Moses needed assistance with the people who were complaining and it is just these foremen that could help in the day to day leadership issues. This would clearly differentiate the Exod 18 and Num 11 texts.

Another crucial difference between the two pericopes is the manner in which the elders are initiated. In Num 11.16 they are brought to the "tent of meeting" and then stationed there together with Moses. Then, verse 17:

וירדתי ודברתי עמך שם	Then I will descend and talk with you there
ואצלתי מן-הרוח אשר עליך	and I will take some of the spirit which is on you
ושמתי עליהם	and I will put it on them;
ונשאו אותך במשא העם	and they will bear the burden of the people with you
ולא תשא אתה לבדך	so that you will not bear it alone

Verse 25 is the parallel text that indicates that all was accomplished:

וירד יהוה ׀ וירבר אליו	Then YHWH descended in a cloud and talked with him
ויאצל מן-הרוח אשר עליו	and he took some of the spirit which was on him
ויחן על-שבעים איש הזקנים	and he put it on the seventy men, the elders
ויהי כנוח עליהם הרוח	and when the spirit rested on them,
ויחנבו ולא יספו	they prophesied but did not continue

The texts above bristle with problems. What is the nature of the m i that is referred to here? Is it the empowering רוח יהוה/אלהים seen quite often in the Deuteronomistic Historians work or a term used in a non-technical

⁶⁴ Weinfeld, "Judge and Officer in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East," 84.

⁶⁵ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Volumes 1-4 combined in one electronic edition (Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill, 1999).

⁶⁶ Koehler, Baumgartner, Richardson, and Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

sense focusing more on Moses than any divine origin?⁶⁷ What is the nature of the verb *אצל* and what effect does it have on the *mi* that is on Moses? Are the verbs *נתן* and *שים/שום* used as verbs of appointment?⁶⁸ These and many other questions are fodder for future studies on this well traversed pericope.

An observation that I would like to make here, however is to focus on the symmetry of the two above verses and what this could tell us about the pericope and the function of these 70 elders. First, it is clear that 17a α , a β and ay are in general harmony with 25a α , a β , ay. It is with 17b α - β and 25b α - β that an interesting interpretative paralleling may be taking place. Does *ויהי כנוח עליהם הרוח* parallel *במשא העם ויהי כנוח עליהם הרוח*? This is how the Masoretic accentuation would have us interpret the consonantal text. The *mi* resting on them is parallel to the burden of sustaining the people. This would mean that the *mi* is not the *יהוה/אלהים mi*, but rather the gifting or the responsibility to lead the people. That the elders would then prophecy (*ייתנבאו*) aligns with the fact that Moses received a calling in the pattern of the classical prophets in Exod 3-4 along with his specific commission to deliver the people. It is the fact that the prophesying is understood as a one-time experience, over against the elders' new responsibility of shouldering the people along with Moses that seems strange. The puzzle continues with the Eldad and Medad incident of 11.26-29. Here prophesying in the encampment (*ויהתנבאו במחנה*, 11.26; *מתנבאים במחנה*, 11.27) is obviously seen as a problem by Joshua. It is one that Joshua wants stopped (*כלאים*, 11.28), which would make them like the other elders in 11.25, since they were part of the originally registered (*ויהמה בכתבים*) group. Within the narrative, Moses interprets Joshua's

⁶⁷ See my article "The Spirit of God in the Old Testament," *Koudan* (1992). It has been reformatted and published online at <http://hebrewscripturesandmore.com/CV/Pdf-Articles/SpiritofGodintheOT.pdf>. At the present time I am of the opinion that the *mi* should not be identified with the *יהוה/אלהים mi*, but rather a more general descriptive use of the term to identify Moses gifting in general. Ze'ev Weisman, "The Personal Spirit as Imparting Authority," *ZAW* 93, no. 2 (1981), 231, states, "The spirit that is conveyed to them from the spirit that is on Moses is meant to have them partake of Moses' authority while also subjecting them to it in a sacred ceremony in which the main performer is God himself."

⁶⁸ When *נתן* and *שים/שום* are used as verbs of appointment they are usually followed by an accusative with rank. See Bruce K. Walkte and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 175. They cite 1 Sam 8.1; Isa 3.7; Deut 1.15 as examples. I would add Jer 1.5c.

demand as possibly being jealous on Moses' behalf (*המקנא חאה לי*). Then Moses focuses, not on the eldership that will assist him in shouldering the burden of the people, but offers the possibility that the whole *nu* of YHWH be appointed prophets (*ומי יתן כל-עם יהוה נביאים*).⁶⁹ The final *כי* clause could be read as a temporal clause, i.e., "when YHWH would give his spirit on them."⁷⁰ Or possibly an asseverative, which originally followed an oath, "i.e., "YHWH will indeed give his spirit on them."

Although a quick supposition may be that the *כל-עם יהוה* is synonymous with *בני ישראל*, Levine indicates that the usage of this phrase may be once again slanted toward governance and leadership issues. He finds that in Judg 5.11 and 2 Sam 1.12 the phrase is military. Then he writes, "elsewhere the context pertains to governance, referring to the anointing of a king over all of the people (2 Sam 6:21; 2 Kgs 9:6). The theme of governance also informs Num 17:6, 1 Sam 2:24, and even Zeph 2:10."⁷²

Another issue that stands out is the possibility that this passage is referring to a larger non-institutional form of governance in which propheticism performs a social-political service of checks that balance the institutional forms of leadership. The text of Num 12.6b α may be translated, "If there should be a prophet of yours, of Yahweh. (*נביאכם יהוה*)"

⁶⁹ See note 62 above. Here the grammatical construction, unlike 11.16 and 11.25, follows the standard for the verb of appointment and the necessary accusative, i.e., "prophets." Furthermore the first clause in 11.29 is an optative clause that utilizes an exclamatory question introduced by the *מי יתן* formula. B. Jongeling, "L'expression *my ytn* dans l'ancien Testament," *VT* 24, no. 1 (1974), 40, presents two conclusions about this formula: "1. L'expression *my ytn* est toujours suivie d'un complement d'objet, soit un objet nominal, soit une proposition-objet. 2. Pour etabli le sens de l'expression dans tel ou tel contexte il faut tenir compte des diverses nuances de signification du verbe *ym*." Therefore the verb of appointment nuance should be considered in this clause: "Would that all the people of Yahweh be appointed prophets!" or as a nominal clause "I wished that all the people of the Lord were prophets!"

⁷⁰ The LXX has $\delta\tau\alpha\nu$ 63 κύριος τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐπ' αὐτούς, which translates as "whenever the Lord would give his spirit on them."

⁷¹ See Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*. 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 9449.

⁷² Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with introduction and Commentary*, 326.

אֲנִי)׃⁷³ This implies that prophets were understood to exist in the narrative depiction of the wilderness. If the poem, 12.6-8 was not original to its present context, then the 2nd person plural may refer to the *ישראל* בני, some leader who utilized a prophetic group not unlike Moses' unique group of seventy elders in 11.16-30 or following the context, specifically Aaron and Miriam.⁷⁴ Either way, this text aligns with 11.29 and offers a picture of a large scale prophetic movement.

5. Rebellious Leaders: Korah, Dathan & Abiram, and the 250

The rebellion of Korah depicted in chapters 16-17 plays an archetypal role when it comes to rebellious leaders. The two chapters however are not easy to analyze. The text has become a magnet, gathering several other rebellious factions.⁷⁵ Milgrom enumerates the four major rebellions as: "the Levites against Aaron; Dathan and Abiram against Moses; the tribal chieftains against Aaron; and the entire community against Moses and Aaron."⁷⁶ I will break up the following discussion according to these four rebellions rather than developing a hypothetical redactional analysis.⁷⁷

⁷³ See my discussion of this stich in David C. Hymes, "Numbers 12: Of Priests, Prophets, or "None of the Above," *AJBI* 21 (1998), 11. The article may be downloaded from: <http://hebrewscripturesandmore.com/APTS-Subpages/BOT640/Documents/Numbers-12-Paper.pdf>.

⁷⁴ See my arguments for going against the scholarly consensus of separating 12.6-8 from its context in chapters 11ff. *ibid.*, 12-13.

⁷⁵ See Davies, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Numbers*, 162-68 for a summary of the redactional history of chapter 16. See also George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 156-84.

⁷⁶ Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*, 129. Risto Nurmela, *The Levites: Their Emergence as a Second-Class Priesthood*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, no. 193 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 129 divides Num 16 into only three groupings: "Three different formations can thus be discerned in Numbers 16: a rebellion against Moses, a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and a rebellion against Aaron, whereby Moses acts as a neutral judge who lets Yahweh settle the quarrel."

⁷⁷ Jacob Milgrom, "The Rebellion of Korah, Numbers 16-18: A Study in Tradition History," in *Society of Biblical Literature: 1988 Seminar Papers*, SBL Seminar Paper Series, no. 27. ed. David Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 570-573.

In verses 1-4 of chapter 16 the different rebellious leaders are introduced, one after the other. The legitimacy of the leaders may vary. Korah may have a certain level of legitimacy as a Levite, while we cannot be sure of the Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram.⁷⁸ It is possible that they were from a military faction, but the evidence is weak.⁷⁹ If military, were they elders like those of Exod 18 that combined the role of judge with military leadership? The 250 are described as tribal leaders/chieftains, but chieftains that were somehow deeply integrated into the *עדה* (נשיאי עדה, 16.2). Moses and Aaron are generally charged with *lèse majesty* against the *קהל/עדה* by an unspecified act or attitude of "arrogance or presumption."⁸⁰

Korah and a group of Levites are depicted first as pitting themselves against Aaron in 16.5-11. The leadership struggle here is not governance in general, but specifically that of ministerial access, i.e., "to approach" or "to draw near" (קרב/√), therefore Aaron and his priesthood (16.10, 11) are the object of their envy. A precedent had been set when the tribal leaders offered gifts and dedicatory offerings and Num 7 could have been the narratological thorn. The root used to describe this was קרב, thus possibly opening the door to an irritant in which Korah and his disaffected cohorts secede from the *עדה* of Israel and establish their own. Milgrom has differentiated the two *עדות* by pointing out that the *עדה* of Israel in these chapters are designated by a definite article or lack the clarifying pronominal suffix that is used for Korah's *עדה*.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers. An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 134-35, notes that the Korahites and Reubenites were encamped in close proximity, therefore possibly accounting for their joint contention. Scholars utilizing source analysis tend to divide the groups according to the JE and P sources. This then would place the contentions in different time periods.

⁷⁹ H. S. Nahmani in Magonet, "The Korah Rebellion," 8, argues that Dathan and Abiram were from a military faction that was staging a coup in light of the failed attempt to go up into Palestine (14.40-45). His main evidence is that in 16.27 they are described as coming out of their tents and "taking their stand" (פחה אהליהם). (יצאו נצבים).

⁸⁰ Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 412.

⁸¹ Milgrom, "Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel," 71-72. Korah's *עדה* is found in 16.5, 6, 11, 16; 17.5, while Israel's *עדה* is found in 16.19, 21, 22, 24, 24; 17.6, 7, 10, 11.

The narrative does not indicate that the Levites that were accompanying Korah were judged. Moses' retort in 16.8-11 may have been sufficient to have checked their revolt. The concluding episode concerning the staff of the tribal leaders (Num 17.16-35 [17.1-13]) may function as a chiasmic closure to their complaints. However, if so, its conclusion is ambiguous since it was not a test on a sub-tribal level within the Levites.

The second rebellion episode is between Dathan, Abiram and Moses in Num 16.12-15. Unlike Korah and his levitical ערה, Dathan and Abiram are not present and are summoned by Moses. They defiantly refuse this summons (לא נעלה, 16.12, 14). The struggle is a governance issue since they refuse Moses' summons,⁸² contests his guidance in the wilderness (16.13) and his leadership style is questioned (כִּי־תִשְׁתַּרְרַר עָלֵינוּ נִמְדָה־שְׂתַרְרַר).⁸³ The Hithpa'el of the verb שָׂרַר that is used here indicates that Dathan and Abiram charged Moses with "elevating himself to a higher position of authority over the people."⁸⁴ Milgrom claims that the form of this verb connotes "playing or pretending to be the lord."⁸⁵ This is not the first time that such accusation against Moses has been made (Exod 2.14 the noun שָׂר is used here). According to Dathan and Abiram, Moses had failed in his promise to bring the people to a land flowing with milk and honey,⁸⁶ therefore he has been deceiving them⁸⁷ and should be removed from leadership.⁸⁸ The affirmation of Moses' leadership and the rejection of

⁸² Magonet, "The Korah Rebellion," 18.

⁸³ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 178. Coats writes, "the complaint has nothing to do with the issue of the Exodus but with a problem of Moses' authority over the people."

⁸⁴ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 165.

⁸⁵ Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*, 133.

⁸⁶ See Nurmela, *The Levites: Their Emergence as a Second-Class Priesthood*, 132-33.

⁸⁷ The meaning of "Would you put out the eyes of these men?" (הֲאֵנְשֵׁי הָהֵם חֲנֻקִים) is obscure. Does it mean that Moses is accused of bribery (Coats, 165), hoodwinking (Milgrom, 134), punishing the people as "runaway slaves, prisoners, and rebellious vassals" (so Levine, 414)?

⁸⁸ Timothy Ashely, *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 303 suggest that the contention was the the Reubenites "felt slighted that the rights of the firstborn had been lost. . . ." Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 424, sees the problem as a "Transjordanian

Dathan and Abiram's charges are ultimately recorded in Num 16.27-34. It is important to note that it was a divine act, i.e., "the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed them up" (וּתְפַחַח הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם־פִּיהָ וַחִבְלָע אֹתָם), 16.32a). It is usually deduced that Korah being mentioned in 16.27, met his demise along with Dathan and Abiram.

The third episode, Num 16.16-18, focuses on Korah as a leader of the 250 tribal leaders who were introduced in 16.2. The use of the censers as a test tends to blur the dividing line between the Levites of 16.5-11 and these chieftains.⁸⁹ This interpretative problem may be artificial and caused by an inappropriate division between secular – governance issues and the sacred – religious struggles.⁹⁰ The rebellion of the 250 is concluded by a notification that they were incinerated (16.35a-β). The issue of "approach" (קָרַב), continued from chapter 7 may be behind their contentions since the root appears frequently in their execution and the disposal of the censers.

The fourth episode (16.19-22) is initiated by Korah in his attempted coup. He assembles, not just his own ערה, but in 16.19 and 22 it is the true Israelite ערה. They are an important and legitimate governing body, but one wonders if their Achilles heel is not their susceptibility to mass hysteria with their collective constitution. As a whole they lack culpability and therefore they are made to separate themselves from Korah's ערה (הַעֲרָה הַזֹּאת, 16.21aβ). The ערה is spared in 16.23-27a, only to respond negatively to Moses and Aaron in 17.1-15 (16.36-50) and

dispute and to Moses' insistence that all of the tribes take part in the conquest of Canaan, west of Jordan."

⁸⁹ Nurmela, *The Levites: Their Emergence as a Second-Class Priesthood*, 131, argues that 250 is a rather low number for a major rebellion when compared with the 603,400 figure of Num 1.46 and the 14,700 take die in Num 17.14. Therefore, "the figure 250 might be appropriate to an account about tensions within the priesthood. Thus it might, in fact, reflect historical circumstances, at least concerning the number of Levites who opposed the Aaronic priests."

⁹⁰ Martin Noth, "Office and Vocation in the Old Testament," in *The Laws in the Pentateuch and other studies*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (London: SCM Press, 1966), 229-30 writes: "In the ancient Near East . . . - and this is especially true of the Old Testament – the spheres of the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the worldly, the divine and the human, were not separated off from one another. A separate set of laws for the "worldly" institutions and offices could not have existed. This is particularly true since Old Testament belief recognizes no order or events on earth which are not created by God, and over whose history God has not stood as Lord. In Old Testament belief one had to be constantly aware of God's direct and unexpected action."

thereby incur their own deserved divine punishment. It is poetic justice that Aaron and his censer stand at the line of demarcation between those who would live and those who would die, thereby affirming once again Aaron's divine appointment.

The overall thrust of the narrative of Korah's rebellion is one of rejection of divine leadership. The spheres of the sacred (priestly hierarchy) and secular (governance hierarchy) are intertwined and contested. The tests via censers and staff are not normative means of testing the validity of leadership. The punishment of earth swallowing up the obstinate or being incinerated are outside the normal purview of disciplinary activity. It ultimately argues that generally speaking, Moses and Aaron must be placed outside the parameters of a repeatable model of leadership **legitimation**.⁹¹

⁹¹ Philip J. Budd, *Numbers: Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 5, electronic edition (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1984), argues that 16.1-35 was actually used to justify the establishment of a post-exilic priestly hierarchy. The above argument based on the uniqueness of Moses and Aaron would make such application within post-exilic struggles hard to sustain. - _