

The Inscrutable Question: Korah's Rebellion & Execution; Plague of the Malcontents; Aaron's Rod that Budded Put into the Ark; the Mercy Seat

3. Aaron's Rod the Budded. This represented rebellion against God's plan revealed by the Tabernacle, the feast days, the sacrifices, and the rituals and executed under the authority of the Levitical priests. Only the anointed members of Aaron's immediate family were permitted to function inside the Tabernacle, a fact ignored by three Levites named Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Numbers 16:1 - Now Korah the son of Izhar / EYZ-har / [**not Aaron**], the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab / e-LY-ab / [**not Aaron**], and On / Ahn / the son of Peleth / PE-leth / [**not Aaron**], sons of Reuben [**not Levi**], took action.

v 2 - and they rose up before Moses together with some of the sons of Israel, 250 leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown.

v 3 - And they assembled together against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone far enough for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

Moses then admonished them for their presumptuous desire to attain the priesthood.

Numbers 16:9 - "Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord and to stand before the congregation to minister to them;

v 10 - and that He has brought you near, Korah, and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking for the priesthood also?"

Moses' solution to this challenge was to conduct an experiment before the Tabernacle. These men were instructed to bring censers, which are firepans for burning incense, to the Tabernacle the next morning. All 250 were instructed to lay fire in them and burn incense before the Lord. The Lord first singled out the ringleaders, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and their entire families for execution. A sudden earthquake consumed all three families.

Number 16:32 - The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up and their households and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions.

Numbers 16:33 - So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

v 35 - Fire also came forth from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

Notoriously slow learners, the people then began to accuse Moses and Aaron of murdering all these people. With this the Lord declared that He was about to consume them instantly. Moses immediately instructed Aaron to take fire from the altar and lay incense on it and run into the congregation so that their sin might be atoned.

Numbers 16:48 - Aaron took his stand between the dead and the living so that the plague was checked.

v 49 - But those who died by the plague were 14,700 besides those who died on account of Korah.

Moses had demonstrated to the people that when Aaron offered incense for them that God would honor it, thus proving only Aaron could function as head of the Levitical priesthood. The Lord decided to drive the point home by conducting another experiment.

Numbers 17:2 - "Speak to the sons of Israel and get from them a rod for each father's household: twelve rods from all their leaders according to their fathers' households. You shall write each name on his rod,

v 3 - and write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there is one rod for the head of each of their fathers' households.

v 4 - "You shall then deposit them in the tent of meeting [**the Tabernacle**] in front of the testimony [**the arc of the covenant**], where I meet with you [**the holy of holies**].

v 5 - "And it will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus, I shall lessen from upon Myself the grumbings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you."

Moses followed the Lord's instructions precisely. He went to each tribe and obtained the rod that indicated the name of the tribe and its leader. On the rod of the tribe of Levi he inscribed the name of Aaron. All twelve of these were taken to the Tabernacle and placed before the arc of the covenant.

Numbers 17:8 - Now it came about on the next day that Moses went into the holy of holies and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds.

v 9 - Moses then brought out all the rods from the presence of the Lord to all the sons of Israel; and they looked and each man took his rod.

v 10 - But the Lord said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumbings against Me, so that they should not die."

15. These items of divine integrity placed inside the ark were reminders of mankind's violation of them. Their sins were later imputed to Christ on the cross.
16. Resting on top of this ark is what is called the mercy seat. It is considered to be a separate piece of furniture but it is designed to fit perfectly atop the ark.
17. The mercy seat is made of pure gold. It consists of a flat lid the same size of the ark and on each end, the image of a cherub. This entire article of furniture is hammered out of one piece of gold.

Exodus 25:17 - "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, three feet nine inches long and two feet three inches wide.

v 18 - "And you shall make two cherubs of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat.

Exodus 25:19 - "And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end. You shall make the cherubs of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends.

18. The positioning of the cherubs gives us clues about the original function of Lucifer as the "anointed cherub."

Exodus 25:20 - "And the cherubs shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another. The faces of the cherubs are to be turned toward the mercy seat.

v 21 - "And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you.

v 22 - "And there I will meet with you; from above the mercy seat; from between the two cherubs which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandments for the sons of Israel."

19. The term "mercy seat" is confusing until you understand what it means. The Hebrew word is *kapporeth* / **kap-PO-reth** / and although translated "mercy seat" it is derived from the root word for "atonement" which means, "to cover."
20. The concept of "mercy seat" can be better understood when we realize it is the location of the Shekinah Glory. Not only did the Shekinah dwell in the holy of holies but we learn more precisely from Exodus 25:22 that He dwelt "above the mercy seat from between the two cherubs."
21. Further, the Tabernacle's holy of holies was a type for the third heaven, the throne room of God. Thus, the "seat" of the mercy seat refers to the throne of the Shekinah in the Tabernacle.
22. The concept of "mercy" can be explained by considering the events that take place during the annual day of atonement. We get a synopsis from:

Elwell, Walter A. (ed.). *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 709:

The symbolic significance of the mercy seat can be seen most dramatically in the events of the day of atonement or *Yom Kippur*. The high priest entered the [holy of holies] containing the ark and the mercy seat. The blood from a bull was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The ritual was part of a larger ceremony in which Israel, through solemn repentance, sought God's forgiveness and mercy for sins committed during the preceding year. The mercy seat symbolized God's mercy, overspreading the breaking of the laws that were contained on the tablets in the ark underneath the mercy seat.

23. The act of God dispensing mercy from His throne is called atonement in the Old Testament because the sins of the people were "covered," the literal meaning of the Hebrew word *kapporeth* / **kap-PO-reth** /, which is translated, "mercy seat."
24. The integrity of God would look down on the mercy seat prior to the sprinkling of the animal's blood and see the three categories of sins committed by the Israelites.
25. His righteousness would condemn these sins and demand that justice judge them. Divine justice was always prepared to do this should Aaron, or any subsequent high priest, fail to bring the blood of the animal into the holy of holies and sprinkle it on top of the mercy seat.
26. When the blood of the animal, which testified to its sacrificial substitutionary death, covered the mercy seat then the view of sin by divine righteousness was obscured by it.
27. The righteous demand for an innocent sacrifice was appeased, justice changed from judgment to mercy and the peoples' sins were atoned.
28. Now, why are the two cherubs standing on each end of the mercy seat looking down upon it? Because the main duties of the cherubs was to proclaim and protect divine integrity.
- 29) In order for divine integrity to be protected there must be a divinely approved method to deal with the sins of the Jewish people that will not compromise divine righteousness or limit divine justice.
- 30) That divinely approved method occurred on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, a high Sabbath observed annually on the tenth day of the month Tishri / TISH-re / (October).