

7. Power Struggle (4Q 2009—People on the Move: The Book of Numbers)

Biblical material: Gen. 17:10–17; Numbers 16, 17; Josh. 4:3–9; Matt. 26:13; Luke 22:19.

Quotes

- Where there is no struggle, there is no strength. *Oprah Winfrey*
- Today we are engaged in a deadly global struggle for those who would intimidate, torture, and murder people for exercising the most basic freedoms. If we are to win this struggle and spread those freedoms, we must keep our own moral compass pointed in a true direction. *Barack Obama*
- Power doesn't corrupt people. People corrupt power. *Anon*
- Power is never good, unless the one who has it is good. *King Alfred*
- The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just. *Abraham Lincoln*
- Struggle is the father of all things. It is not by the principles of humanity that man lives or is able to preserve himself above the animal world, but solely by means of the most brutal struggle. *Adolf Hitler*
- This is a struggle of good and evil. And we're the good. *Howard Dean*
- You can observe a lot just by watching. *Yogi Berra*

Questions

What do we learn from the children of Israel regarding the fundamentals of human nature? Why do people seek power? What are the results? How do we explain the severity of the way the Lord dealt with these rebels? What does this say about their understanding of God, and how does this relate to us (and the universe) today?

Bible discussion

Circumcision and descendants: that was the promise to Abraham (and Sarah) in Genesis 17. But in Numbers 16 and 17 we see the whole plan going wrong—again! The rebellion of Korah is often told in the context of authority, but it is better viewed as who is telling the truth! The actions of the rebels revealed their true intent—their desire to replace Moses. The love of power has led many to ruin. The Lord's actions were sadly necessary in order that more would not be lost. Even so, after the clear demonstration of God, some of the Israelites still complained (16:41), blaming Moses for killing “the Lord's people”! This reveals the extent to which the Israelites were intent on going their own way, and rejecting Moses (and by implication God) as leader.

In Numbers 17 God has to continue his teaching of these rebellious people by a clear demonstration that they would understand—rods with names on them that would miraculously bud to indicate who the Lord had chosen. It is sad to see to what level God had to stoop to convince such stubborn people. Aaron's rod not only budded, but produced ripe almonds! Even so the people just gave vent to their mentality, and cried out that they were all doomed, that they all would die. In this they revealed how they understood God, and their very low level of trust.

Comment

The temptation to seize power is one that has affected individuals and churches through the ages, and still continues today, inevitably leading to behaviour that has little to do with Christian principles. In seeking to be pre-eminent and “lord” it over the others, any such “church dictator” is in direct opposition to the words of Jesus: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you” (Matthew 20:25, 26 NIV). The highest commendation of God is that you have said and acted rightly, as he told Job. Yet in leadership, acting rightly so often gets confused with acting in self-interest. That is why short terms in power are surely helpful, for the longer one remains in power, the more the temptation to misuse that power for a personal agenda.

Moses clearly was not on a “power trip,” and did have the best interest of the people at heart. Yet he was frequently criticized, and the subject of many complaints. Yet in all of this we do not see Moses taking this to heart personally, but rather sought to represent God to the people, and prayed for them.

Similarly in the person of Jesus. He comes to the garden of Gethsemane to meet the attacks of the Devil. Quiet and still, it’s as if the whole creation is looking on, breathless, watching and waiting. What will happen? Alone, Jesus meets the attacks. Not this time the subtle insinuations of the Garden of Eden. Not evil in the form of a beautiful creature to tempt, but a fierce and terrible dragon who spits fire and flame in order to terrify Jesus, to break him by force. This is the true nature of evil. In the mind of Jesus a terrible battle is going on. In the stillness of the garden is a war between Jesus, son of man, and the whole mighty army of the Devil. This is no ordinary temptation. It is the power struggle for the universe, with the strength of the Devil matched against man’s trust in God. Jesus does not call down all the legions of the angels who waited at his command. He does not use his divine power. He does not fight force with force, but with the simple words of prayer to his Father—to do his will (see Matt. 26:38, 39).

In the Garden of Eden the battle was lost. In the Garden of Gethsemane the battle was won. The battle in Gethsemane was so much greater. When we sinned, we placed ourselves under the control of the Devil, and lost our perfect state. Jesus was “found in fashion as a man”—and he had all man’s frailties and difficulties. Yet in our humanity, Jesus faces the onslaught and demonstrates the truth God has maintained all along.

Ellen White Comments

The reason many in this age of the world make no greater advancement in the divine life is because they interpret the will of God to be just what they will to do. While following their own desires, they flatter themselves that they are conforming to God’s will. {AA 565}

Just before us is the closing struggle of the great controversy when, with “all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness,” Satan is to work to misrepresent the character of God, that he may “seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.” If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world. {5T 746}