

Korah: The Two-Word Phrase Parasha Sheet
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Here's something different. The story of Korah can be told in some of the many two-word phrases that we find in the text. In the following chart, we have the verse the two-word phrase, and a comment. Enjoy!
 Shabbat Shalom!

16:1	וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח	And Korah took. What did he take? Rashi says <i>he took himself to one side</i> . He set himself apart, he, the three Reubenites, and the 250.
16:2	אֲנָשֵׁי־שֵׁם	Men of renown. He didn't take just anyone. These were big-shots!
16:3	רַב־לֶכֶם	You have too much! Korah's complaint to Moses is that all the power is concentrated in the Amram family. Moses is the political leader, Aaron is the religious leader. Why do they get all the power - and the prestige!
	כֻּלָּם קְדוֹשִׁים	Everyone is holy. How come you are behaving as if you are <i>holier than thou</i> ?
	וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה'	And God is in their midst. This is a clever argument.
	וּמַדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְׂאוּ	Why do you lord over us? From the beginning of his argument, we get the sense that Korah is only interested in power.
16:4	וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה	And Moses heard. Not only did he hear. He understood Korah's intent.
16:5	בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּלְדַּע	In the morning God will make known. Great strategy for Moses. The face-off will be in daylight, with no ambiguity. Despite his frustration, Moses is confident in his position and will get a good night sleep. They on the other hand, will be up all night worried that their plot might fail.
16:6	זֹאת עֲשׂוּ	This is what you are to do. At least the narrator of this text knows who's boss!
16:7	וַתָּנוּ... אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂימוּ .. קִטְרֶת	Put fire; place incense. In the firepans, small bronze shovel-like receptacles for holding the burning coals and the smoldering incense. We remember what happened to the last pair of individuals who approached the holy zone with <i>strange fire</i> . Nadav and Avihu were incinerated. Moses is telegraphing to Korah that the same fate awaits him.
16:9	הַמְעַט מִכֶּם	Is it too little for you? This is the heart of the argument. Korah is a Levite, he has a privileged place in the people. There are no small roles. You may not be the leader, but you have a significant part to play. Can you not accept that?
16:12	לֹא נֵעֲלֶה:	We are not coming! The response of Dathan and Aviram to Moses. A double entendre because they simultaneously rejecting Moses' summons and they are also hinting something broader in their rejection: we're not <i>going up</i> to your intended destination, the Land, because you took us here to die in the desert.
	חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ	Milk and honey. This is how the despicable Dathan and Aviram refer to the land of Egypt! The bitterest among them, they have such <i>sweet</i> things to say.
16:15	וַיִּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה	And Moses became angry. He was angry not only about the insurrection but about the maligning of the land. The sheer contempt of the whole project.
	לֹא חֲמוֹר	Not one ass. An expression of exasperation. <i>What did I do to them? I didn't take anything from them!</i> In power structures, the powerful oppress the powerless, and often take possession of their property at will. Samuel 12:3 says something similar when expressing his exasperation at the people's complaints.
16:17-18	אִישׁ מִחַתָּתוֹ	Each man and his firepan. This phrase is repeated four times (in these two verses) for effect. Korah, Aaron, and the 250 all have firepans. That's a lot of metal to mettle with. It's also foreshadowing because metal is not a combustible material. Human beings, on the other hand, are. The metal will be plated to the altar.
16:19	וַיִּקְהַל עֲלֵיהֶם	And they assembled against them. Korah assembles the entire cohort (or is the entire community?) <i>against</i> Moses and Aaron in this showdown. Echoes of other <i>assemblies</i> are present. Exod. 32:1 וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד - the <i>were assembled</i> against Aaron in Golden Calf episode, and Exod. 35:1 וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - <i>Moses assembled the entire people</i> prior to the assembly of the tabernacle, at

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		which point he reissued the Shabbat instructions. Korah's assembly is more Golden Calf than Shabbat.
16:20	וְאֶכְלָה אֹתָם	And I will destroy them. We recall that when God first appears to Moses, God is a fire in a bush and that וְהַסִּנֵּה אֵינּוּ אֶכְלָל - <i>the bush was not consumed</i> . We often overlook that the meaning of that vision: Under the right circumstances, (a holy, moral people, that lives by God's covenant) God's overwhelming consuming power can radiate from a holy place and sustain an entire people. Under the wrong circumstances (immoral, unholy, rebellious people) it is unleashed and will destroy everything. Here, the order and structure that are enabling God's presence to be contained within Israel are about to fall apart, with cataclysmic results. What's amazing is that Moses and Aaron appeal to God's moral sense (almost like Abraham appeals to God in the case of Sodom): אֵל אֱלֹהֵי הַרְוֵחַת לְכָל-בָּשָׂר הָאִישׁ אֶחָד: יִחַטָּא וְעַל כָּל-הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָף: - <i>O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, at the entire community, will You be furious?</i> (16:22). The words have an impact. God's destructive power will only be inveighed against the transgressors.
16:24	הָעֹלֹ מִסָּבִיב	Go up from around. Moses instructs the people to clear away from <i>the dwelling-place of Korah, Datan and Aviram</i> . There's something happening here. (<i>But what it is ain't exactly clear. Buffalo Springfield.</i>)
16:25	זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	The elders of Israel. When Moses faces off with Dathan and Aviram he is there with his own entourage, those who have intermediary authority and legitimacy.
16:26	סוּרוּ נָא	Pray turn away. Moses exhorts the people once again to take cover. The word סוּרוּ usually always means, <i>turn away from something bad</i> . סוּר מָרַע - Ps. 34:15
16:27	פֶּתַח אֹהֲלֵיהֶם	At the entrance of their tents. With the people now at a distance, the rebels stand at the entrance of their own familial tents, as opposed to the entrance of the communal <i>tent</i> . What is about to take place is an inversion of Pesach. At Pesach the people were inside their homes and protected. Here the despicable rebels are out in the open and unprotected by any barrier or cover.
16:28	בְּזֹאת תִּדְעוּן	By this you shall know. On the one hand, he's talking to the rebels. But there's a slight irony here because in a moment, they will all be dead. So, it is as if Moses is saying to them, the last thing that you will know is that this is from God. On the other hand, he is also talking to the onlooking people. <i>If these people die normally, God didn't send me. But if they die by the ground opening up its mouth</i> וּפְצֹתָהּ הָאֲדָמָה אֶת-פִּיהָ - <i>then you will know that these people messed with God.</i>
16:31	וַתִּבְקַע הָאֲדָמָה	The earth split. Careful readers will note that Moses was present at another cataclysmic element-splitting event. וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת הַיָּם לְחֶרֶבָה וַיִּבְקַעוּ הַיָּמִים. <i>and the sea turned into dry land and the water split.</i> (Exod. 24:1)
16:32	וַתִּפְתַּח הָאָרֶץ וַתִּבְלַע אֹתָם	The earth opened. אֶת-פִּיהָ - its mouth. And swallowed them. וְאֶת-בֵּיתֵיהֶם - and their households.
16:33	חַיִּים שְׂאֵלָה וַתִּכַּס עֲלֵיהֶם וַיֵּאבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ	Alive to She'ol. Most people who descend to She'ol are usually dead first. The earth covered them. Pretty self-explanatory. And they were lost from the midst. הַקְהָל - of the community. The leaders, the <i>men of renown</i> are now in the ground.
16:34	נָסוּ לִקְלָם פֶּן-תִּבְלַעַנּוּ	They fled at the sound of their voice. In absolute terror. The people saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears. And they fled. Lest we be swallowed. A reasonable fear.
16:35	וְאֵשׁ יִצְאָה	And a fire came forth. And consumed the 250. Just like Nadav and Avihu, Lev. 10:2 וַתִּצְאָ אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם: <i>And a fire came out from the presence of God and consumed them...</i> Some people never learn!
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