

Sermon 6.23.18

Parshat Korach

"Financing the Revolution"

In this week's parshah we read that Korach is punished for his attempted revolution – "And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all Korach's people and all their possessions."

The next verse continues: "They went down...with all that belonged to them."

It is strange that the text points out and repeats that all their possessions were destroyed as well. What was Korach carrying with him in the desert?

In masechet Sanhedrin 110a, Rabbi Levi tells us that: "Just the keys to Korach's treasure houses required three hundred strong mules to carry them..."

Korach was rich and he carried with him an enormous amount of wealth! Where did he get it? Dry goods?

Rabbi Chama son of Rabbi Chanina says in the Midrash: Three treasures did Joseph hide in Egypt: one was discovered by Korach; Korach found Joseph's treasure.

An alternatively midrash says that Korach was Pharaoh's finance minister, "and he had in his hands the keys to his treasures" (Bamidbar Rabba 18:15).

Either way, why is Korach's wealth important to the rabbis, i.e. worthy of mention? One answer is given by the Talmud (our same page, Sanhedrin 101a): "Stored treasures bring evil to their owners" ([Ecclesiastes] 5:12). Excessive wealth brings its owners to boastfulness, chasing after honor and demanding privilege beyond what is due, and wealth like this,"

In other words, Korach's wealth corrupted him.

I want to suggest another reason why the rabbis think it is important to mention Korach's wealth: The rebellion alone, just based on ideas – but without financing – would not have lasted long. His wealth, however, gave important backing to his revolt.

In modern times, we have the saying: Follow the money. Ideas that are financed get much more play than others that don't have someone to buy advertising, or pay for reports, or attract news stories.

In the Torah, when Korach had his rebellion, the earth swallowed him up. Maybe God was trying to say that his ideas were dangerous or that he went about his challenge to Moses in the wrong way.

But the Torah tells us that the ground swallowed up Korach AND his possessions — for a reason. Maybe God was trying to level the playing field.

I'm not a gambling man, but if I were, I would want to be on the side of the scientific reports, the news stories and ideas in society that were well funded...that had the keys to the treasury, like Korach.

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