

## Who was Dathan in the Bible?

Dathan was one of four ringleaders who incited a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron while the Israelites journeyed in the wilderness (Numbers 16). Dathan was the son of Eliab, from the tribe of Reuben. He, his brother Abiram, a fellow Reubenite named On, and a Levite named Korah brought 250 Israelite leaders to challenge Moses' right to lead them. They said, "The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly" (verse 3)?

Moses was distraught at this challenge and the rebelliousness behind it, and he ordered Dathan and the other men to appear before him the next morning with censers full of incense and hot coals to offer to the Lord. Offering incense was to be performed only by God's priests, but these men claimed that they should have the same right as Moses and Aaron to be leaders. Moses' plan would let the Lord show them the foolishness of their demand. Dathan and the other malcontents, along with the high priest, Aaron, would offer their incense, and the Lord would publicly choose His priest.

Moses tried to reason separately with Korah, reminding him that as a Levite he was already chosen by the Lord for special service (Numbers 16:8-11). But Korah would not listen. When Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, they defied his command and issued a surly response: "We will not come! Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you also want to lord it over us! Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you want to treat these men like slaves? No, we will not come!" (Numbers 16:12-14).

None of the rebels were willing to listen to Moses' appeals. The next morning, Dathan and the others came to the tabernacle with censers in hand. The Lord was so angry at their insolence that He wanted to destroy all of the Israelites, and He told Moses and Aaron to step aside so He could. Moses pleaded with the Lord for mercy, so the Lord brought judgment only on the ones who had incited the rebellion. Dathan, Abiram, and Korah stood with their families and possessions at the entry to their tents, and the Lord caused the ground to open and swallow them (Numbers 16:31-33).

At the same time, the Lord sent fire to consume the 250 men who held the censers, incinerating the rebels. Later, God told Eleazar the priest to collect the censers, scatter the coals, and "hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the Lord and have become holy" (Numbers 16:38). The bronze overlay was to "be a sign to the Israelites" of God's wrath against sin and the importance of accepting God's choice.

Because Korah was a Levite, the tribe already chosen by God to lead the people in worship, the Lord seems to have held him most responsible for this rebellion. Jude 1:11 refers to this event as "Korah's rebellion." However, Dathan and his cohorts received the same punishment that God gave Korah. While the judgment may seem severe to us, God was showing His people Israel that He was holy and would not tolerate their defiance of His decrees. They could not approach His presence and offer to Him whatever they chose, but they must obey Him in everything, including the offering of sacrifices (Numbers 15:40).

We can learn from Dathan's sin that the Lord requires more from those to whom more has been given (Luke 12:48). He holds us responsible for the knowledge, callings, and

opportunities He gives us. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram serve as reminders that God takes seriously our disregard for His holiness and that a terrible fate awaits those who reject His choice of a Savior (Revelation 21:8).