

Numbers: 16

By

Alan Clark

A Biblical Story

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AVCG
centurytw@att.net

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EXT. DAY

A BIRD

glides forward in the clear blue sky; point of a large flock. A majestic creature; he blinks, and looks down --

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

at people who walk, and run between small tents aligned in desert sand. Ten...twenty...fifty...hundreds...thousands move in the direction that he flies.

At this speed, our feathered friends should reach their destination well before these humans, even if there are no more tents to navigate below. Smooth sailing --

BLACK

A long haired woman reaches down to the ground. She grasps a stunned, dark colored bird firmly with her left hand, and twists its head with her right. The tattered satchel that her small child holds up to her is of the same fabric she wears. The bird is dropped inside. The pair run forward.

Robe and sandaled men, women, and children all run in the same direction.

A teen-aged girl picks up a bird. She gives it to her dad as they run. He does what needs to be done, and hands it to mom. Mom drops it into her satchel as she's hit in the shoulder by a helpless bird.

Another bird twitches on the dusty ground. Another hand picks it up.

As the people come closer en masse to their destination, they slow down.

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

A MASSIVE CROWD

gathers at a safe distance from a large, man-made structure.

This enclosure is made of white tent fabric, ten feet high, suspended by vertical wooden pillars, placed in the desert ground, fifteen feet apart. The simple entrance is well guarded by men who stand at attention; each holds a long spear. Flags rest in a light breeze.

MEN, arms chained together, hold the loud crowd back.

(CONTINUED)

At the immediate perimeter of the Tabernacle, far fewer birds drop from above. On the semi-distant horizon, flocks continue to fall.

THE LOW RUMBLE OF -- SOMETHING

is inescapable.

Faces of the gathered throng denote wide eyed anticipation, anger, and of those that stare above the Tabernacle -- fear.

A MAN

kneels in the sand a short distance from the Tabernacle, and apart from the crowd; silent, eyes lowered. In the b.g. stand several old men dressed in white; elders of the congregation. Each hold a metal bowl suspended from chains. Smoke bellows from these censers.

The man, MOSES, opens his eyes. He looks up at the Tabernacle.

A beat.

He looks up further, above the Tabernacle; mouth agape. Tears run down his white-bearded, aged, sun-baked face. He wears an every-man's robe and sandals. Long, gray hair.

ARRON, Moses' younger brother -- 70's, dressed in priestly robe, breastplate, and headdress adorned with large jewels -- stands behind Moses. He holds a six foot long wooden staff.

EXT. TENT - DAY

A large, tan tent is situated to the right of the Tabernacle. A hundred or so men dressed in princely garb, gather outside of the enclosure, and assemble under a covered entrance. Moses and Arron are within speaking distance.

KORAH -- tall, bearded, dark, muscular, 40's -- walks to the fore of the entrance way. He looks toward the Tabernacle... and above. His eyes lower to the ground.

DATHAN -- a fat, shirtless slob in his 50's, with earrings that hang out of every orifice of his tattooed head, and his skinny brother, ABIRAM -- 30's, short cropped hair, pointy beard -- stand with Korah. They motion for quiet from the crowd. With some persuasion, order is achieved.

(CONTINUED)

KORAH

You think too much of yourselves,
Moses, seeing *all* the congregation
are holy...

He gestures towards the crowd --

KORAH (CONT'D)

...every one of them. And the Lord
is among them. Why then, do you
and Arron lift yourselves above the
congregation of the Lord?

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

Moses rises to answer this confrontation. Arron helps him
to stand up strong. He hands Moses the staff. The crowd
grows silent as Moses gives his response.

MOSES

By...t-tomorrow, the Lord will show
who are his, and who
is...h-holy. Him whom he hath
chosen will he ch-ch-cause to come
near unto him.

EXT. TENT - DAY

Korah and his men smile, and shrug at one another. Women
and children exit the tent, and stand with their men under
the tent entrance. Clean, white gowns. Flawless hair and
makeup. Upper-class.

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

Arron whispers something in Moses' ear.

MOSES (CONT'D)

K-Korah, Dathan...A-Abiram. Do
this, as will I and Arron. Take up
censers, and put fire therein...put
incense in them, and go up before
the L-Lord. It shall be th-that
whom the Lord chooses...h-he shall
be holy.

EXT. TENT - DAY

Dathan and Abiram can hardly contain themselves.

ABRIAM

We will *not* go up!

(addressing the crowd)

We have wandered in this desert,
lost...for ten years. Ten years!
These men have not brought us into
a land of milk and honey. Where
are our fields...our vineyards? We
will not go up with...these men.

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

Many in the crowd grow restless. Moses sees their reaction but, again, he speaks to those who stand at the tent.

MOSES

Brethren, f-for which cause both
you, and all thy company are
gathered together against the
L-Lord *this* day?

(points to Arron)

Seek ye the priesthood from Arron?

EXT. TENT - DAY

Korah crosses his arms. Smiles disappear from the faces of his men. A hush over the crowd as the RUMBLE from above intensifies for a moment.

MOSES (CONT'D)

(points to Korah)

Y-You think too much of yourselves,
sons of Levi!

Princes murmur amongst themselves. Korah directs a few of these men back into the tent.

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

MOSES (CONT'D)

Hear me, I pray thee. Sons of
Levi, does it s-see a small thing
to you that the God of Israel has
separated you from the
c-congregation of Israel...

Moses gestures toward the crowd with the wooden staff --

(CONTINUED)

MOSES (CONT'D)

...to bring you near to himself to
do the s-service of the Tabernacle
of the Lord?

(points to the Tabernacle)

A FORCE

from within the Tabernacle causes the fabric walls to bellow outward. The ground shakes. Guards nearby prepare to be overcome. A few run away.

EXT. TENT - DAY

Dathan slams his hand against a wooden post. He looks at Korah before his emotions spew forth before the congregation:

DATHAN

You, Moses. You, Arron...You
brought us up out of a land that
flowed with milk and
honey...Egypt. Is it a small thing
that we will die here in the
wilderness...only to have you
priests over our dead bodies?

(addressing the crowd)

Put out the eyes of these men or we
shall all...

Korah grabs Dathan by the arm, and pulls him aside to have a word. Dathan will have none of it --

DATHAN

(to Korah)

I am not finished...

KORAH

Watch your tongue. Moses speaks to
the Lord.

Dathan resists Korah's grasp.

KORAH (CONT'D)

The Lord listens.

Abriam asserts himself into this conversation.

ABRIAM

(to Korah)

It is time...Now is the time we
must tell the congregation...no

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ABRIAM (cont'd)
more! The priesthood is too much
for one man. Arron must step
aside, and Moses...

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

A LOUD THUD

Shakes the ground.

SILENCE

People in the crowd fall to their knees in worship, and
fear.

EXT. TENT - DAY

Korah braces himself with one hand against a pole. He is
hesitant to direct his gaze above the Tabernacle.

He gives in. Bird-droppings fall on Korah's face. He wipes
it...off.

THE LOW RUMBLE continues.

Some of Korah's followers return from inside the tent. Each
one carries an ornate metal bowl suspended from multiple
chains. Smoke bellows from each bowl.

Men begin to light fire in, and distribute, these
censers. First to Korah, then to all of the men of renown
who are gathered outside the tent. Women and children are
not involved in this ceremony.

Dathan, then Abriam are each handed a censer --

DATHAN
Korah, do not fall into this trap.
Moses and Arron are nothing but
showmen...they're good at it. The
congregation...

ABRIAM
(to Korah)
...The people must see this from
our perspective. This is just
another...spectacle. How many
times have we confronted these two
heretics...only to be brought down
by their pious antics?

(CONTINUED)

KORAH

The congregation must not think we
hesitate to go before the Lord. We
shall meet their challenge.

Korah walks away from Abriam, Dathan, and past the other
men. Abriam and Dathan reluctantly follow.

The three step out from under the tent entrance, and onto
sun-baked sand. They walk toward the entrance of the
Tabernacle. Scores of men follow. They all carry censers
that bellow thick smoke.

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

Elders hand Moses and Arron smoke filled censers.

ARRON

(to an elder)

You must keep the people back.

The elder runs over to the men who hold the crowd away from
the Tabernacle. He speaks to them as Arron and Moses begin
to walk the short distance to the Tabernacle.

The ground SHAKES.

-KORAH'S eyes widen. He and his men pause in their tracks.

-Moses puts the censer down, and kneels to the ground.

MOSES

O, God. God of the spirits of all
flesh. Shall one man sin, that
thou would be wroth with all the
congregation?

Moses bows his head in reverence.

The quake stops. Korah and his men continue the walk.

MOSES (CONT'D)

(in prayer)

Lord...respect not their offering.

Moses looks up above the Tabernacle. He rises to his feet

--

MOSES

(to the congregation)

If these men die the c-common death
of all men, then the lord hath not
sent me.

(CONTINUED)

Dathan and Abiram look at one another. Korah looks back at the tent. His men. His family.

MOSES (CONT'D)

But if God make the earth to open
her mouth...and swallow up them,
and all that they have...th-THEN
YOU WILL KNOW THAT THESE MEN HAVE
PROVOKED THE LORD. S-S-SEPARATE
YOURSELVES FROM THESE WICKED MEN,
AND t-TOUCH NOTHING OF
THEIRS!...LEST YOU BE CONSUMED IN
THEIR...

A LOUD THUD

violently shakes the ground. It doesn't stop this time.

Moses, Arron, and the crowd move away from the Tabernacle as fast as they can. Many in the congregation stumble, and fall. They help one another to their feet...and run.

Korah and his men drop the censers, and begin to run back toward the tent. The earth gives way beneath them. Priestly men disappear in sand and dust. Others hold on for dear life to one side or another of splitting ground.

Screams of agony fade into the darkness below.

EXT. DAY

A LARGE BIRD

glides through the air. He looks down --

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

at total chaos, as men try to escape the separating sands; only to fall into an abyss. The crack in the earth travels from in front of the Tabernacle, to the tent structure.

EXT. TENT - DAY

Men, women, and children panic as they try to get away from the oncoming fissure. Too late. In an instant, the tent structure, priests, families, animals -- everything -- gone.

EXT. TABERNACLE - DAY

The crack in the earth closes. Quake stops.

THE LOW RUMBLE continues.

Moses halts, turns toward the Tabernacle, and leans on his staff. He kneels while people yell, and scream in the dust filled b.g. as they flee the horrific scene. Confused horses and cattle bolt in all directions.

Moses stares above the Tabernacle in silent prayer.

THE END