

The Timing of the Episode of Korach
[From Rashi, Ramban and Kedushas Levi
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In Bamidbar chapters 16 and 17 we read of the episode of Korach. Korach gathers together a following to challenge the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu. On the surface, it would appear that he was representing the people, claiming that all should be Kohanim that there was no need for a hierarchal religious system. Our rabbis, however, tell us that Korach was really challenging Hashem and the entire Torah. Hashem chose Moshe to be the leader and Aharon and his male descendents to be Kohanim. He simply masked his true intentions with claims to be representing the people's right to holiness as we read in verse 16:3 that he states, "All Yisroel is holy so why are you lording over Hashem's congregation?"

When exactly did this take place? Rashi and Ramban both state that this incident occurred right after the incident of the spies and the decree for that entire generation not to enter Eretz Yisroel. This explains the placement of these two events near each other in the Torah. Since it was now clearly established that the entire generation was not going to enter Eretz Yisroel, except for Yehoshua and Calev, now was the optimum time to create revolution against Moshe. A revolution against Moshe at the height of his popularity would be doomed for failure. But now that there was resentment against Moshe over the promise of entering Eretz Yisroel not being fulfilled, Korach could gain a following for his cause. We see from the Midrashim that Dasan and Aviram for a long time had issues with Moshe Rabbeinu as the Midrashim identify troublemakers against Moshe Rabbeinu from the very beginning as these two individuals. Rashi tells us that Korach had jealousies that date back at least to the time of the dedication of the Mishkan. It was understood in Korach's eyes that Amram the oldest son of Kehos would have sons in leadership positions as Moshe and Aharon were Amrams's two sons. However, at that time, Elitzafan Ben Uziel was appointed as the head of the Kehos division of Levi. Korach felt that since he was the son of Yitzhar, the second of Kehos's sons, he felt he should have been appointed to a position of leadership and not the son of Uziel the fourth son of Kehos. Most importantly, Korach felt all of these appointments were done by Moshe Rabbeinu on his own and not by Hashem. However, the time of the dedication of the Mishkan would certainly be no time to get a following to rebel against the system so Korach, Dasan, and Aviram waited till now. The Ramban initially quoted the Ibn Ezra who maintains that this incident took place at the time of the initial appointments but rejects this position for the reasons given above as well as the fact that the Torah placed it over here. Ramban explains that unless there is a clear reason to apply the Gemara's

principle that the Torah is not written in chronological order, we assume that we are to follow the Torah's sequence of events.

The Kedushas Levi follows the same line of thought as Rashi and Ramban that this incident took place after the decree of not entering Eretz Yisroel was issued. The Kedushas Levi explains further that originally they were not going to be in the desert that long. So Korach was not bothered by Elitzafan's appointment to a higher position than him. But When Korach saw that they were going to be in the desert for forty years, then he could not bear the thought any longer of Elitzafan being above him.

The Kedushas Levi then explains on a deeper level, that covenant of salt, as the covenant that Hashem made with the Kohanim is referred to, was to symbolize the failure of Korach's ideology. The Kohen represents *Chesed*, kindness and the Levi, *Din*, judgment. Korach wanted a world of pure *chesed*, symbolized by all of us being Kohanim. On the other hand pure *din* would not work either as Hashem had to put both *chesed* and *din* into the creation symbolized by the Torah stating in Bereishis 2:4 the day *Hashem Elokim* created the heavens and the earth as is well-known that the name Hashem refers to his merciful side and *Elokim* his judgmental side. Salt is a fusion of fire and water, also a fusion of *din* and *chesed*, fire being *din* and water being *chesed*. Hashem made the covenant of salt with the Kohanim to show that our world, being as it is, needs to have *chesed* and *din* both present but balanced.

Of course, the only way to determine the proper balance would be through the eyes of our Torah. We alone cannot define kindness and harshness. We are too influenced by our own biases. Only with the guidance of Hashem's Torah can we achieve the true balance necessary to serve Hashem properly.