SUMMARY OF KORACH

Korach, Moshe's first cousin, leads a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon together with members of the tribe of Reuben—Datan, Aviram, and On ben Pelet—the two sons of Eliav, and 250 leaders of the community. They accuse Moshe of seizing the leadership for himself and raising himself above everyone else: "The entire people is holy; why do you set yourselves above the rest?". Moshe answers that the next day God will reveal who the true leader is and adds, "Is it not enough that God has consecrated you within the community of Israel for the service of the Tabernacle that you now demand the priesthood as well?" At its core—he explains to them— they are not rebelling against him or against Aharon, but against the order God has established. Moshe sends for the two sons of Eliav, but they refuse to come, claiming it is unjust that he sets himself above them and condemns them to die wandering in the desert. Moshe then commands Korach and his followers to prepare the priestly fire and offer incense to God.

At the entrance of the Ohel Moed (the Tent of Meeting), Moshe and Aharon take their place before the rebels and the rest of the community. The Presence of God appears to the whole assembly, and God says to Moshe and Aharon: "Stand back from these rebels, for I am about to destroy them in an instant." The two fall on their faces and plead: "God, if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire community?". God then commands Moshe to warn the people: "Move away from these wicked men and touch nothing that belongs to them, lest you perish for their sins." The people draw back. Moshe declares: "By what you are about to see, you will know that it is God who sent me, and that I am not acting of my own will." No sooner does he finish speaking than the earth opens beneath Korach and the other ringleaders and swallows them with all their possessions; then it closes over them, and they vanish. A fire descends from heaven and consumes the 250 men who were

offering the incense. Moshe instructs Elazar, son of Aharon, to gather the fire pans used in the offering, hammer them flat, and overlay the altar with them, as a perpetual warning to anyone who would dare challenge Aharon’s priesthood.

The next day, the community accuses Moshe and Aharon of being responsible for the death of God’s people. God tells them to stand apart from the congregation, for He intends to destroy it, and a plague begins to strike the nation. Moshe tells Aharon to take the consecrated incense at once, go into the midst of the congregation, and atone for the people’s sins. Aharon obeys, stations himself between the living and the dead, and the plague stops.

God commands Moshe to take one staff for each of the twelve tribes, with the name of each tribe’s leader inscribed on it, and one more for the tribe of Levi, bearing Aharon’s name. The staff spends the night in the holiest place of the Tabernacle. The next morning, when they are removed, only Aharon’s staff has miraculously blossomed with almond flowers: one more proof that he is the one chosen by God for the High Priesthood. God orders that the staff be placed back beside the Ark of the Covenant, where it will remain as a testimony.

The people express to Moshe their fear of mistakenly entering a restricted area of the Tabernacle and dying because of it. In response, God charges the priests and the Levites with the strict guarding of the Tabernacle, to prevent access by those who are not priests.

Finally, the Torah lists the offerings to which the priests are entitled: choice portions of the sacrifices, the five silver shekels for the redemption of the firstborn, a share of the grain, oil, and wine harvests, the first fruits, and more. But they are told that their descendants will receive no portion in the land of Israel—the most coveted thing materially: God Himself will be their inheritance and their portion. The Levites, too, receive no land; in exchange for

their service in the Temple, they are entitled to a tenth of the other tribes’ harvests. And upon receiving that tithe, the Levites must in turn set aside a tenth of it and give it to the priests.