

# JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

## Korach

Each day of the we say a different chapter from Psalms which we call the “song of the day.” The particular song is the same song that the Levites used to sing in the Temple along with the daily sacrifice. On Mondays, we say Psalm 48 which discusses the great beauty and strength of Jerusalem and the Temple, and prophetically states there will be a day when that the nations of the world will be intimidated by its strength. What is the unique connection between this chapter of Psalms and the second day of the week?

The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 31a) explains that on the second day of creation, “G-d divided his creation, reigned over it, and and dwelled on high.” Rashi there explains that when G-d divided the upper waters and the lower waters on the second day of creation, he establishing the entity called ‘heaven’ and concentrated his divine presence there. In addition, G-d’s spiritual channels rule over the physical properties of the lower world. Rashi explains that, in a similar vein, G-d concentrated his holy presence in Jerusalem and in the Temple. So although G-d’s presence is mostly concentrated in the heavens, there is one place on earth where his presence is more intense than any other place on earth.

While Rashi and Rosh Hashana 31a explain the connection between the chapter’s description of the awesome holiness of Jerusalem and the second day of creation, they do not address the very opening of this chapter, which attributes the chapter to the sons of Korach. The Talmud (Bava Batra 14b) says that, although we generally consider King David the composer of Psalms, actually ten people collaborated to author the book. Rashi explains that David wrote the words said by people who lived generations earlier through divine inspiration, and incorporated them into his book of Tehillim. Three of the ten contributors to the book are sons of Korach. But why did the sons of Korach merit divine inspiration; did they not join their wicked father in his rebellion against Moshe and Aharon?

Rashi (Psalms 42:1) says that although these three sons of Korach originally joined their father in his rebellion, they separated themselves from his group later during the dispute and did not die when the earth opened up and swallowed the rebels. While the earth swallowed up the sinners, they repented and decided they did not want to be a part of the rebellion. Instead, they composed twelve chapters of song which later became part of David’s Psalms. Because they recognized their wrongdoing and sincerely wanted to repent, they merited divine inspiration and prophetic vision. Rashi adds that they prophesied primarily about the exiles of Israel, the destruction of the Temple, and the monarchy of the family of David.



# JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

continued ...

In light of this Rashi, we could understand why Korach's sons compose a whole song (Psalm 48) about the beauty of Jerusalem. When the earth miraculously opened up, they saw this change from the natural order of creation as an act of G-d. With renewed belief in G-d and his omnipotence, they realized their wrong in rebelling against his prophet. While others saw the earth opening as a terrible punishment for the arrogant rebels, they saw the presence of G-d and humbly regretted what they did. Seeing the presence of G-d revealed in the course of nature, they are inspired with prophetic vision about the revelation of the G-d throughout history. Thus, they prophesy about G-d revealing himself in redeeming Israel from exile and Israel building a Temple to glorify his name.

We see this idea later, in Deuteronomy (11:6), when Moshe exhorts the Jewish people to guard the ways of the Torah. He tells them that they should remember the miracles of the past in order to strengthen their conviction in G-d's presence and his intervention with the world. He points out that they saw the miraculous plagues in Egypt (11:3), the splitting of the sea (11:4), and miracles in the desert (11:5). Then he refers to the earth opening its mouth (11:6) to swallow Datan and Aviram, their families, and possessions, "in the midst of all Israel." Clearly, the earth opening up was not simply meant to be a punishment to Korach's group. Rather, it was also meant to be a source of inspiration to the rest of the Jews upon seeing G-d's intervention and his presence.

We also see from the mishna in Avot (5:6) that the miraculous opening of the earth serves as a reminder of G-d's presence and his glory. The mishna lists the mouth of the earth among the ten things that were created at twilight at the end of the six days of creation. Most of the items listed are things that would be future changes in the course of creation, such as the well that provided water to the Jews in the wilderness. Although there would be more than ten miraculous changes from the course of creation in the future, these changes have special significance. The uniqueness of the earth opening lies in that it served both as a punishment to the Korach group and as a form of inspiration to others about the presence of G-d.

When we read the story of Korach, the opening of the earth can actually serve as a reminder of G-d's presence in our lives. Just as the sons of Korach saw this phenomenon and were inspired to see the revelation of G-d's presence in more forms, we can look at miraculous events in our lives, even if they might be catastrophic, as sources for inspiration.

*Shabbat Shalom*

Rabbi Yosef Saltzman

3921 Fabian Way Suite A-017  
(650) 493-5764



Palo Alto, CA 94303  
[www.jsn.info](http://www.jsn.info)