

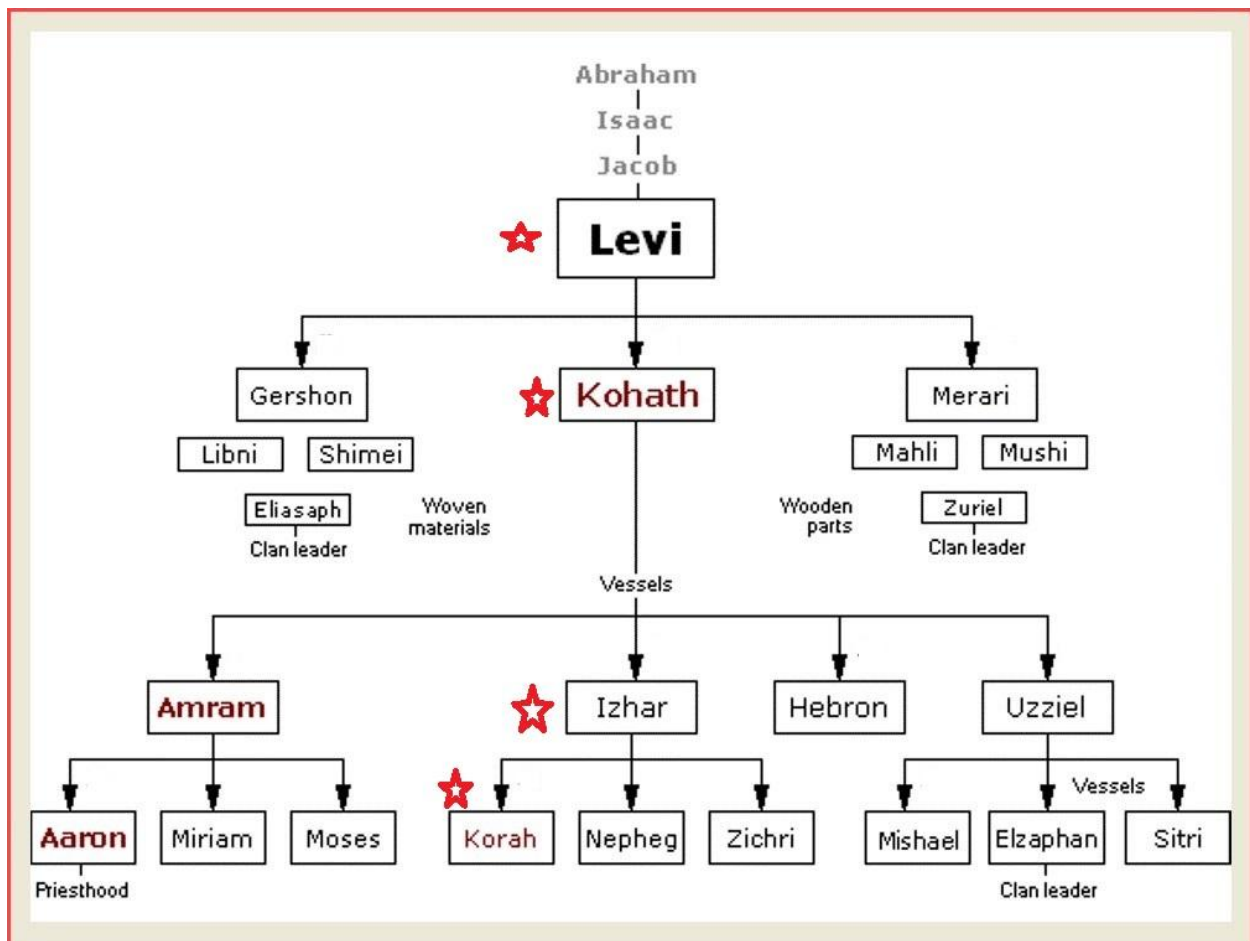
Numbers 16

Verses 1 - 3

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*,² and they stood before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, 250 leaders of the congregation chosen in the assembly, men of renown.³ They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You have gone far enough! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi.....

See pic 1605



The family of Korah carried the holy furnishings of the Tabernacle.

See Pic 1610



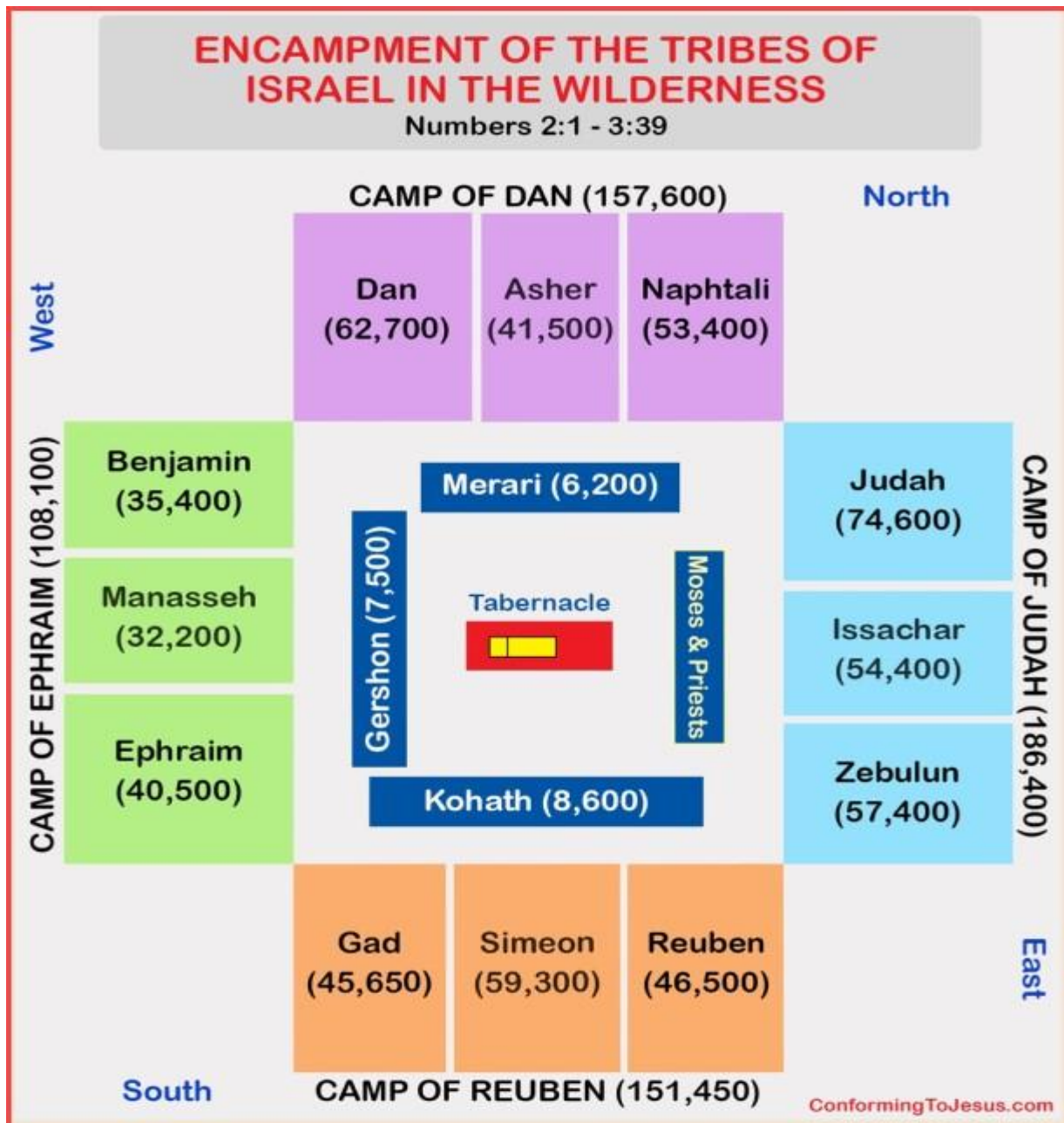
² and they stood before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, 250 leaders of the congregation chosen in the assembly, men of renown.

Korah was the leader of this rebellion but he had 250 prominent leaders that stood with him besides the other men mentioned in verse 1.

³ They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You have gone far enough! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

These men believed that Moses had exalted himself above everybody else. After all, God was in the midst (literally at the center) of the whole community.

See pic 1615



It seems that this group of men had not learned much from the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron. Since Miriam was forced to live outside the camp for a week we can assume the entire community had heard about their rebellion.

See Numbers 12:1- 2

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); ² and they said, “Is it a fact that the Lord has spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” And the Lord heard *this*.

Verses 4 -11

When Moses heard *this*, he fell on his face; ⁵ and he spoke to Korah and all his group, saying, “Tomorrow morning the Lord will make known who is His, and who is holy, and will bring *that one* near to Himself; indeed, the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself. ⁶ Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and your whole group, ⁷ and put fire in them, and place incense upon them in the presence of the Lord tomorrow; and the man whom the Lord chooses *shall be* the one who is holy. You have gone far enough, you sons of Levi!” ⁸ Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹ Is it too small *an honor* for you that the God of Israel has singled you out from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to perform the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them; ¹⁰ and that He has brought you near, *Korah*, and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? But are you seeking the priesthood as well? ¹¹ Therefore you and your whole group are the ones gathered together against the Lord; but as for Aaron, who is he, that you grumble against him?”

⁶ Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and your whole group, ⁷ and put fire in them, and place incense upon them in the presence of the Lord tomorrow; and the man whom the Lord chooses *shall be* the one who is holy. You have gone far enough, you sons of Levi!”

Moses knew that only Priests were allowed to present fire and incense before the Lord so why did Moses tell them to do this? God may have instructed Moses to do this so the Levites would suffer the consequences of stepping out of line.

⁸ Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹ Is it too small *an honor for you* that the God of Israel has singled you out from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to perform the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them;

Korah had been given a great honor when God assigned his family to carry the holy furnishings of the Tabernacle which included the Ark of the Covenant. But Korah was not content with that privilege; he wanted to be part of the priesthood.

Since these men desired to be in the priesthood, why not let them perform one of the functions of the office (offering incense) and see how it goes. One didn't need to be a prophet to know how this was going to turn out.

Verses 12 - 14

¹² Then Moses sent a summons to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said, “We will not come up. ¹³ Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also appoint yourself as master over us? ¹⁴ Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you gouge out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!”

¹² Moses sent a summons to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said, we will not come up

The Israelites had a judicial system with judges and Moses was in essence the Supreme Court.

See Exodus 18:24 - 26

²⁴ So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything that he had said. ²⁵ Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. ²⁶ Then they judged the people at all times; they would bring the difficult matter to Moses, but they would judge every minor matter themselves.

Moses sent a summons to two of the men but they refused to show up. They may have remembered what happened to Nadab and Abihu.

See Leviticus 10:1-2

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on the fire and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

¹³ Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also appoint yourself as master over us?

Dathan and Abiram had three complaints:

1. Moses had brought them up from a land flowing with milk & Honey.

2. They would be spending 38 more years in the wilderness and die there.
3. They thought Moses was acting like a slave master

Was there any truth to their arguments?

1. They called Egypt a land flowing with milk and honey. To some degree that may have been true because the slaves did eat well but being a slave to the king nullifies that benefit.
2. It was their sin (lack of faith) that kept them in the wilderness.
3. Dathan and Abiram were Reubenites. Reuben was the first-born son of Jacob that had lost his right to rule Israel because of his indiscretion with Jacob's concubine. They may have felt that they had a claim to leadership but God had chosen Moses to lead Israel not them. Nevertheless, these two men accused Moses of being a slave driver like the Egyptians that raised him.

¹⁴ Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you gouge out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

This expression is an idiom meaning, Moses was trying to blind them to the true facts. It was true that Moses had not brought them to the Promised Land but that was the fault of the 10 spies and the people who believed their report.

These men must have suspected that God would punish those who opposed Moses so they stay at home.

Verses 15 - 19

¹⁵ Then Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, "Pay no attention to their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them." ¹⁶ Moses said to Korah, "You and all your group be present before the Lord tomorrow, you and they along with Aaron. ¹⁷ And each of you take his censer and put incense on it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, 250 censers; also you and Aaron shall each bring his censer." ¹⁸ So they took, each one his own censer, and put fire on it, and placed incense on it; and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting, with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹ So Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

¹⁶ Moses said to Korah, “You and all your group be present before the Lord tomorrow, you and they along with Aaron. ¹⁷ And each of you take his censer and put incense on it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, 250 censers; also you and Aaron shall each bring his censer.”

Korah and the 250 men of renown were all told to appear before the Lord with their censer. Why did these men have a censer since only the sons of Aaron were allowed to offer incense to the Lord? We can see that this rebellion was not just about the leadership of Moses but also that these Levites wanted to be part of the priesthood. Moses mentioned this in verses 8 thru 10.

¹⁹ So Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

Since all of Israel was behind this rebellion, God wanted everyone present

Verses 20 - 24

²⁰ Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²¹ “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, so that I may consume them instantly.” ²² But they fell on their faces and said, “God, the God of the spirits of humanity, when one person sins, will you be angry with the entire congregation?” ²³ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ “Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get away from the areas around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’”

Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²¹ “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, so that I may consume them instantly.

God was ready to destroy all of Israel for this act of rebellion.

²² But they fell on their faces and said, “God, the God of the spirits of humanity, when one person sins, will you be angry with the entire congregation?”

Moses and Aaron were quick to intercede for the people again because God was ready to destroy all of Israel. Moses argued that all of Israel should not be punished along with the leaders of this rebellion. However, we will see shortly that the people were just as guilty as the leaders.

²³ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ “Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get away from *the areas* around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’”

God listened to Moses and decided to punish just the leaders of the rebellion at this point in time.

Verses 25 - 30

²⁵ Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him, ²⁶ and he spoke to the congregation, saying, “Get away now from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin!” ²⁷ So they moved away from *the areas* around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out *and* stood at the entrances of their tents, along with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. ²⁸ Then Moses said, “By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these deeds; for it is not my doing. ²⁹ If these men die the death of all mankind, or if they suffer the fate of all mankind, *then* the Lord has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them with everything that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will know that these men have been disrespectful to the Lord.”

²⁵ Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him, ²⁶ and he spoke to the congregation, saying, “Get away now from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin!” ²⁷ So they moved away from *the areas* around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out *and* stood at the entrances of their tents, along with their wives, their sons, and their little ones.

Dathan and Abiram would not come to Moses, so he went to them. When Moses warned the people to move away from these three leaders of the rebellion they did as he said.

It is sad that the families of these men would suffer the same fate but it does send a message to those who would rebel against Moses that there was more at stake than just their own lives. Leaders have to consider how their families will be affected when they make bad decisions.

²⁹ If these men die the death of all mankind, or if they suffer the fate of all mankind, *then* the Lord has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them with everything that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will know that these men have been disrespectful to the Lord.”

It is obvious that God had revealed to Moses what was about to happen. This was not going to be death from old age but an instantaneous death from being buried alive.

Verses 31 - 35

³¹ And as he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, and all the people who belonged to Korah with all *their* possessions. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ Then all Israel who *were* around them fled at their outcry, for they said, “The earth might swallow us!” ³⁵ Fire also came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

³¹ And as he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, and all the people who belonged to Korah with all *their* possessions.

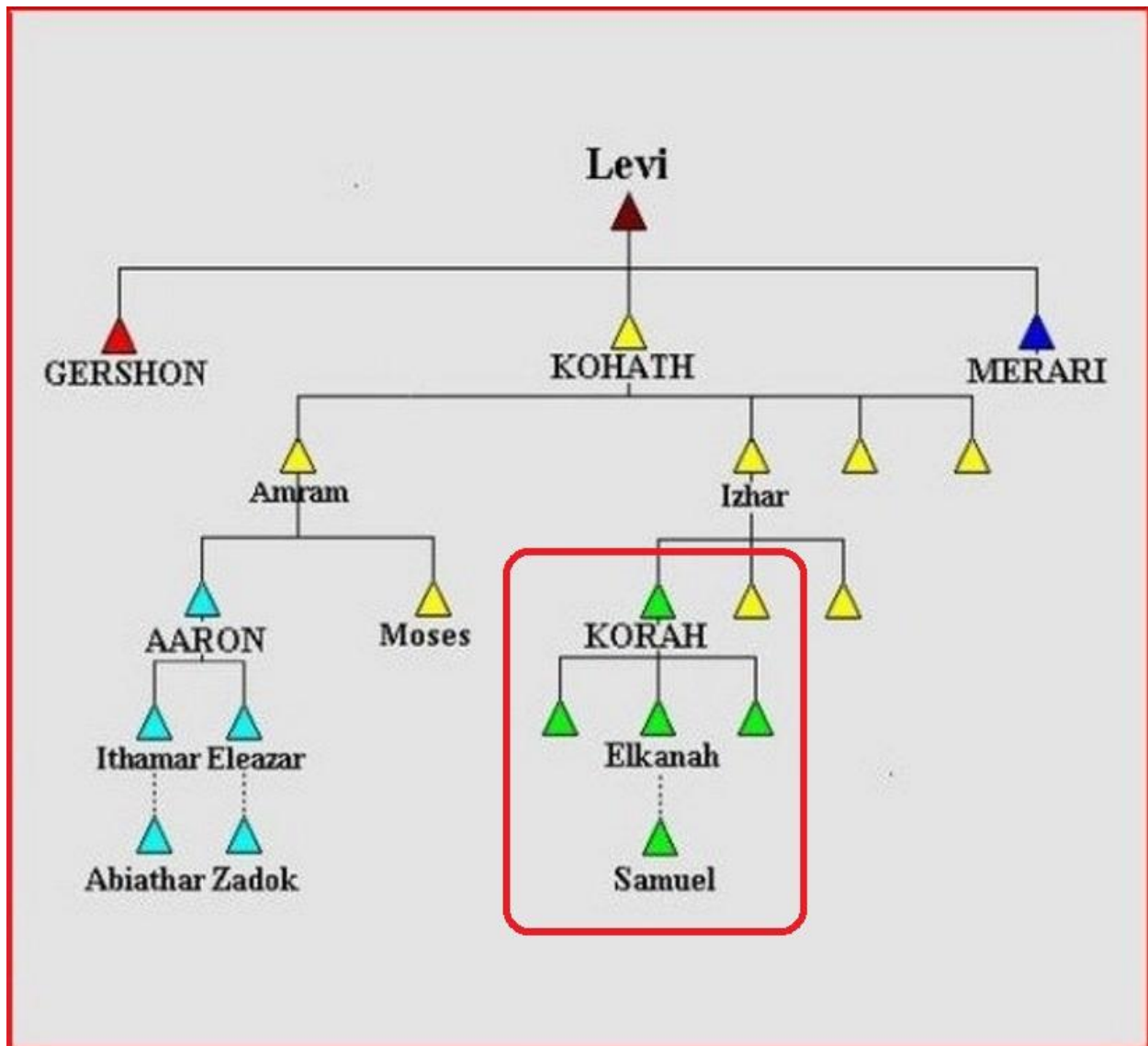
When it says “all the people who belonged to Korah” it is natural to assume that this meant his entire household but that was not the case because in chapter 26 we are told that the sons of Korah escaped the judgment of their father.

See Numbers 26:11

⁹ The sons of Eliab: Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram who were called by the congregation, who fought against Moses and against Aaron in the group of Korah, when they fought against the Lord, ¹⁰ and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that group died, when the fire devoured 250 men, so that they became a warning sign. ¹¹ The sons of Korah, however, did not die.

The prophet Samuel came from his descendants.

See chart 1620



Also, the sons of Korah are credited with writing eleven different Psalms:

Psalms 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87, 88.

³⁵ Fire also came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

The death of 250 men by fire should shock any group of people and this judgment should have ended any further thoughts of rebellion. But amazingly, another rebellion will take place within 24 hours.

Verses 36 - 40

³⁶ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁷ “Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, that he shall pick up the censers from the midst of the burned area, because they are holy; and you are to scatter the burning coals further away.

³⁸ As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their own lives, have them made into hammered sheets as plating for the altar, since they did present them before the Lord and they are holy; and they shall serve as a sign to the sons of Israel.” ³⁹ So the priest Eleazar took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as plating for the altar, ⁴⁰ as a reminder to the sons of Israel so that no layman, *anyone* who was not of the descendants of Aaron, would approach to burn incense before the Lord; then he would not become like Korah and his group—just as the Lord had spoken to him through Moses.

³⁶ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁷ “Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, that he shall pick up the censers from the midst of the burned area, because they are holy; and you are to scatter the burning coals further away.

Here the High Priest is called the priest. The writers of the O.T assumed the people of Israel knew who the High Priest was, so it was not unusual for them to simply use the term priest.

³⁹ So the priest Eleazar took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as plating for the altar, ⁴⁰ as a reminder to the sons of Israel so that no layman, *anyone* who was not of the descendants of Aaron, would approach to burn incense before the Lord....

Only the male ancestors of Aaron (the priests) were permitted to burn incense before the Lord. So any Levite that was not a priest was considered a layman and they were required to maintain their place and not desire the priesthood.

Unfortunately, this reminder did not stop future generations from this act of rebellion. When Jeroboam came to the throne in 930 BC he appointed priests of all the people

See 1 Kings 13:33

³³ After this event, Jeroboam did not abandon his evil way, but he again appointed priests of the high places from all the people; anyone who wanted, he ordained, and he became *one of the* priests of the high places.

Verses 41 – 46

⁴¹ But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You are the ones who have caused the death of the Lord’s people!” ⁴² It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared. ⁴³ Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, ⁴⁴ and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁴⁵ “Get away from among this congregation so that I may consume them instantly.” Then they fell on their faces. ⁴⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put fire in it from the altar, and place incense *on it*; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord, the plague has begun!”

⁴¹ But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You are the ones who have caused the death of the Lord’s people!”

God had judged and killed the leaders of this rebellion but despite what the people had just witnessed they decided to confront Moses and Aaron about who was to blame for the death of these people.

⁴³ Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, ⁴⁴ and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁴⁵ “Get away from among this congregation so that I may consume them instantly.” Then they fell on their faces.

No one can doubt that God has been patient and long suffering with this generation of people. Despite the many miracles they have witnessed and the blessings they have received they continue to insult God and those he has appointed. It is amazing how Moses and Aaron continue to intervene on their behalf.

⁴⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put fire in it from the altar, and place incense *on it*; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord, the plague has begun!”

The leaders of this rebellion had been dealt with and now the common people would suffer for their part in the rebellion. Therefore, Moses told Aaron to act quickly because God’s judgment had already started.

Verses 47 - 50

⁴⁷ Then Aaron took *it* just as Moses had spoken, and he ran into the midst of the assembly; and behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put *on* the incense and made atonement for the people. ⁴⁸ And he took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was brought to a halt. ⁴⁹ But those who died by the plague were 14,700 *in number*, besides those who died on account of Korah. ⁵⁰ Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been brought to a halt.

⁴⁸ And he took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was brought to a halt. ⁴⁹ But those who died by the plague were 14,700 in number, besides those who died on account of Korah.

Even though the entire congregation had grumbled against Moses (verse 41) only a small portion of them died by the plague. However, the punishment was sufficient enough for God to make his point.

There were three separate punishments because of this rebellion.

1. The death of Dathan, Abiram, Korah, and their families (but not the sons of Korah) by the earth swallowing them alive.
2. The death of the 250 men of renown by fire from God.
3. And the plague that destroyed 14,700 of the people.