

Likewise in the flood stories, as separated in Chapter 2, the P story is about a cosmic crisis. The windows of the heavens and the fountains of the deep are breaking up, and the waters that surround our habitable bubble are pouring in. In JE, it rains.

And so throughout P we read about the cosmic God of a great, ordered universe. The way to communicate with this God is through the formal, ordered structures that he has provided as the only channels to him. It is not through talking snakes or talking asses; not through meetings with angels; not through dreams or prophets. It is through prescribed sacrifices at prescribed times, performed by a prescribed priesthood in a prescribed manner.

Thus P has a story that two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, make an offering that God did not prescribe. The result is that "fire went out from before Yahweh and consumed them, and they died. . . ." <sup>12</sup>

## Rebellion in the Wilderness

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### The Rebellion, Numbers 16

1 AND KORAH SON OF IZHAR SON OF KOHATH SON OF LEVI And Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, sons of Reuben,

2 Rose up before Moses. AND TWO HUNDRED FIFTY PEOPLE FROM THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, PRINCES OF THE CONGREGATION, KNOWN IN ASSEMBLY, PEOPLE OF STATURE

3 ASSEMBLED AGAINST MOSES AND AGAINST AARON AND SAID TO THEM: "YOU HAVE A GREAT DEAL! FOR ALL OF THE CONGREGATION, ALL OF THEM ARE HOLY—AND YAHWEH IS IN THEIR MIDST. AND WHY DO YOU LIFT YOURSELVES UP OVER YAHWEH'S COMMUNITY?"

4 AND MOSES LISTENED, AND HE FELL ON HIS FACE.

5 AND HE SPOKE TO KORAH AND TO ALL OF HIS CONGREGATION, SAYING, "IN THE MORNING YAHWEH WILL MAKE KNOWN WHO IS HIS AND WHO IS HOLY AND WHOM HE WILL BRING CLOSE TO HIM. HE WILL BRING CLOSE TO HIM THE ONE WHOM HE CHOOSES.

6 DO THIS: TAKE YOURSELVES INCENSE BURNERS, KORAH AND HIS CONGREGATION,

7 AND PUT FIRE IN THEM, AND SET INCENSE ON THEM BEFORE YAHWEH TOMORROW. AND IT WILL BE THAT THE MAN WHOM YAHWEH WILL CHOOSE, HE WILL BE THE HOLY. YOU HAVE A GREAT DEAL, SONS OF LEVI!"

8 AND MOSES SAID TO KORAH, "LISTEN, SONS OF LEVI,

9 IS IT TOO SMALL A THING FOR YOU THAT THE GOD OF ISRAEL HAS SEPARATED YOU FROM THE CONGREGATION TO BRING YOU CLOSE TO HIM, TO DO THE SERVICE OF THE TABERNACLE OF YAHWEH AND TO STAND BEFORE THE CONGREGATION TO SERVE THEM,

10 AND THAT HE HAS BROUGHT YOU AND ALL YOUR BROTHERS THE SONS OF LEVI WITH YOU CLOSE TO HIM? AND YOU SEEK THE PRIESTHOOD AS WELL?!

11 THEREFORE YOU AND ALL YOUR CONGREGATION WHO ARE GATHERING ARE AGAINST YAHWEH. AND AARON, WHAT IS HE THAT YOU COMPLAIN AGAINST HIM?"

12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and they said, "We will not come up.

13 Is it a small thing that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, that you lord it over us as well?

14 Besides, you have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey or given us possession of field or vineyard. Will you put out those people's eyes? We will not come up."

15 And Moses was very angry, and he said to Yahweh, "Do not incline to their offering. Not one ass of theirs have I taken away, and I have not wronged one of them."

16 AND MOSES SAID TO KORAH, "YOU AND ALL YOUR CONGREGATION, BE BEFORE YAHWEH—YOU AND THEY AND AARON—TOMORROW.

17 AND EACH MAN TAKE HIS INCENSE BURNER, AND PUT INCENSE ON THEM, AND EACH MAN BRING HIS INCENSE BURNER CLOSE BEFORE YAHWEH, TWO HUNDRED FIFTY INCENSE BURNERS, AND YOU AND AARON, EACH MAN, HIS INCENSE BURNER."

18 AND EACH MAN TOOK HIS INCENSE BURNER, AND THEY PUT FIRE ON THEM AND SET INCENSE ON THEM, AND THEY STOOD AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE TENT OF MEETING, AND MOSES AND AARON.

19 AND KORAH ASSEMBLED ALL THE CONGREGATION AGAINST THEM, TO THE ENTRANCE OF THE TENT OF MEETING. AND THE GLORY OF YAHWEH APPEARED TO THE WHOLE CONGREGATION.

20 AND YAHWEH SPOKE TO MOSES AND TO AARON, SAYING,

21 "SEPARATE FROM THE MIDST OF THIS CONGREGATION, AND I SHALL CONSUME THEM IN AN INSTANT."

22 AND THEY FELL ON THEIR FACES, AND THEY SAID, "GOD, THE GOD OF THE SPIRITS OF ALL FLESH, WILL ONE MAN SIN AND YOU BE FURIOUS AT THE WHOLE CONGREGATION?"

23 AND YAHWEH SPOKE TO MOSES, SAYING,

24 "SPEAK TO THE CONGREGATION, SAYING, 'GET UP FROM AROUND THE TABERNACLE OF KORAH[, DATHAN, AND ABIRAM<sup>13</sup>].'"

25 And Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel went after him.

26 AND HE SPOKE TO THE CONGREGATION, SAYING, "TURN AWAY FROM THE TENTS OF THESE WICKED MEN AND DO NOT TOUCH ANYTHING THAT IS THEIRS, LEST YOU BE DESTROYED IN ALL THEIR SINS."

27 AND THEY GOT UP FROM AROUND THE TABERNACLE OF KORAH[, DATHAN, AND ABIRAM]. And Dathan and Abiram went out, standing at the entrance of their tents, and their wives and their sons and their infants.

28 And Moses said, "By this you will know that Yahweh sent me to do all these things, for it is not from my own heart.

29 If these die like the death of every human, and the event of every human happens to them, then Yahweh has not sent me.

30 But if Yahweh will create something, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they go down alive to sheol,<sup>14</sup> then you will know that these men have provoked Yahweh.”

31 And it was as he was finishing to speak all these things; and the ground under them was split.

32 And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses. **AND ALL THE PEOPLE WHO WERE WITH KORAH, AND ALL THE PROPERTY.**

33 And they and all they had went down alive to sheol. And the earth covered them over, and they perished from the midst of the community.

34 And all Israel that was around them fled at the sound of them; for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us.”

35 **AND FIRE WENT OUT FROM YAHWEH AND CONSUMED THE TWO HUNDRED FIFTY PEOPLE OFFERING THE INCENSE.**