

Two Rebellion Stories

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Agenda

- Last week you listened as I read the story of Noah and the flood and only later did you learn that the two versions were interleaved
- This week we will study the story of the Rebellion in the Wilderness, which is also an interleaved text
- I will read each version separately, allowing you to follow the text and see the interleaving

Approach

- I will tell you the plot line and the six key elements of each story first, so you can see as we read each that we are following just one version and are skipping the other
- Recall the struggle for the priesthood between Aaronid priests and Levite priests mentioned in Lesson 1
 - Here we see a very early story related to that struggle for the right to claim the priesthood

Setting and Name of God

- This story in Numbers 16 occurs after the laws were handed down to Moses at Mt. Sinai, as the people were wandering aimlessly in the wilderness
- Since, according to the P author, God had revealed his name of Yahweh earlier in the story of the burning bush, the P author refers to God as Yahweh (as J does even before the burning bush story)
 - So the name of God is *not* a factor in this story

Writing Style

- See if J's writing style matches the writing style we saw in the flood story
 - Lean and smooth, story telling style, perhaps a bit folksy or casual
- See if P's writing style matches the writing style we saw in the flood story
 - Very verbose, ponderous and serious writing style

Split verses

- As we separate the two versions, remember that the verse and chapter delineations were not in the original text, nor in the original interleaved text
- The verses and chapters were created only a few hundred years ago, thousands of years after the original writing, and by people who had no idea that the text was a combination of multiple sources
- So in some cases, the switch from one version of the story to the other occurs in the middle of a verse

Common plot

- Rebels rebel against their leadership
 - Rebels have specific complaints that are given to the leadership
- Leaders respond by specifying a test that allows God to demonstrate whether He agrees with the rebels or the leaders
- The rebels are killed, showing God's support for the leaders

J's version

- Rebels are Dathan, Abiram, and On
- Leader is Moses (and only Moses)
- Confrontation is at the entrance of the rebel's tents
- Complaint is that Moses has taken them out of the land of milk and honey (Egypt!) and lords over them
- Test is premature death of rebels
- Result is that the ground splits open and swallows up the rebels

P's version

- Rebels are Korah (great-grandson of Levi) and 250 people
- Leaders are Moses and Aaron
- Confrontation is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting
- Complaint is that Moses and Aaron are limiting the priesthood to Aaron
- Test is burning of incense, which can only be done by priests
- Result is that fire went out from God and killed the rebels

Contrasts

- J's version *does not even mention* Aaron, though the whole point of P's version is that God legitimizes Aaron's exclusive claim to the priesthood
- J's version has *nothing* to do with the priesthood, but it is the *central* point of contention in P's version
- J's version does not mention the Tent of Meeting, which is prominent in several P stories

Separate the Stories

- Numbers 16
- J: 1b-2a; 12-15; 25-26; 27b-32a; 33-34
 - About 14 verses in all
- P: 1a; 2b-11; 16-24; 27a; 32b; 35
 - About 21 verses total
- In verses 24 and 27, the names Dathan and Abiram were added either by the redactor when merging the two versions, or by a scribe copying the text who did not understand he was copying interleaved texts

Numbers 16:1-9

- 1** Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abi'ram the sons of Eli'ab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben,
- 2** took men; and they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men;
- 3** and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"
- 4** When Moses heard it, he fell on his face;
- 5** and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to him; him whom he will choose he will cause to come near to him.
- 6** Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company;
- 7** put fire in them and put incense upon them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!"
- 8** And Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi:
- 9** is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them;

Numbers 16:10-18

10 and that he has brought you near him, and all your brethren the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also?

11 Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together; what is Aaron that you murmur against him?"

12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abi'ram the sons of Eli'ab; and they said, "We will not come up.

13 Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us?

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

15 And Moses was very angry, and said to the LORD, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one ass from them, and I have not harmed one of them."

16 And Moses said to Korah, "Be present, you and all your company, before the LORD, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow;

17 and let every one of you take his censer, and put incense upon it, and every one of you bring before the LORD his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer."

18 So every man took his censer, and they put fire in them and laid incense upon them, and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 16:19-28

19 Then 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.

20 And the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron,

21 "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

22 And they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be angry with all the congregation?"

23 And the LORD said to Moses,

24 "Say to the congregation, Get away from about the dwelling of Korah, **Dathan, and Abi'ram.**"

25 Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abi'ram; and the elders of Israel followed him.

26 And he said to the congregation, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins."

27 So they got away from about the dwelling of Korah, **Dathan, and Abi'ram**; and Dathan and Abi'ram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones.

28 And Moses said, "Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord.

Numbers 16:29-35

If these men die the common death of all men, or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me.

30 But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."

31 And as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split asunder;

32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods.

33 So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

34 And all Israel that were round about them fled at their cry; for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up!"

35 And fire came forth from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense.

Aaronids vs Levites

- Notice that in P's story, the condemnation is of the Levites; they are recognized as performing "services in the Tabernacle", but punished for wanting the priesthood as well
- The point of P's story is to refute the belief that Levites are legitimate priests
 - This is very similar to the removal of the sacrifice by Noah in the flood story

Two or More Texts

- Dual versions of stories are called doublets
- There are about 30 cases of doublets in the Pentateuch (Jewish Torah)
 - Includes several cases of triplets as well
- There are numerous stories which are given by only one author, and these tend to be the lesser known stories
- Most of the well known stories are duplicated
 - Creation
 - Noah and Flood
 - Abraham's covenant
 - Jacob
 - Moses, Pharaoh, Plagues, Exodus
 - Mt Sinai Covenant and Ten Commandments

Combining Four Texts

- Several methods for handling doublets and triplets were used
 - Interleaving
 - Back to back placement of separate versions
 - Scattered placement of separate versions
 - And there is at least one example of half of each story being used!
- Interleaving is the most drastic method, and is used only when necessary

Interleaving Two Versions

- The combining of multiple texts was done to produce a single text, not a comparative study
- The combined text was meant to hide the fact that it was a combination of separate texts
- Given that there were two versions of the flood story and two versions of a story of people being suddenly and dramatically killed in the wilderness, does it make sense that someone trying to combine two texts would choose to interleave these two particular stories?

Two Stories Interleaved

- In the case of the flood story, interleaving is absolutely required because you cannot have a story about God destroying everyone on earth, promising to not do it again, and then doing it again!
- It is also rather compelling that the two rebellion stories had to be interleaved, given the unlikelihood of people rebelling against Moses a second time after his leadership was so dramatically affirmed by God the first time

Questions We Will Answer

- Why are there so many stories with multiple versions?
- Are we looking at a few isolated stories or did each author write a complete history?
- Who are these (four) authors?
- When and where did they live?
- What motivated each author?
 - What did each author advocate?
 - What did each oppose?
- Did they know they were writing the Bible?

More Questions

- Did they know of each other's texts?
- Were they eye witnesses to the events they wrote about?
 - If not, what material did they start with?
- Were they collaborating with each other?
- Were the texts even written about the same time?
 - If not, what order were they written in?
- Was one of the texts used as a framework for insertion of the other three?
- What are the literary characteristics of the writing of each author?
- What is unique about each author's text?

Questions about the Redactor

- Who combined the texts?
 - There is reasonable evidence to identify this person
- When, where and why were the texts combined?
 - Was all the combining done all at once?
- Was any text deleted when the texts were merged?
 - If so, how did they decide which text to keep?
- How was the combined text presented to the people of Israel?

Questions Beyond the Torah

- The redactor limited his work to the Torah
- Does duplication of texts exist elsewhere in the Old Testament?
- If so, where?
- Can we relate those duplications to those in the Torah?

Questions for Discussion

- Do you believe in God because you believe in the Bible?
- Or do you believe in the Bible because you believe in God?
- Must one believe in the Bible totally or not at all?
- Can one believe in some parts of the Bible but not all?