

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers: Introduction

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will take an overview of Numbers, the fourth book of the Pentateuch.

Following the Book of Exodus, Moses led the congregation of Israel at Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments and built the Tabernacle. After these things, in Leviticus, God called Moses and gave detailed instructions concerning all kinds of regulations for worship and service, in order to maintain the holiness of the people of Israel. After all these things had taken place, they were about to truly enter the wilderness. Therefore, in Hebrew, the title of this book in the Torah means "the wilderness."

In the wilderness there were no resources for life or survival; they had to rely completely on God's care and leading. Yet because of human foolishness and rebellion, people also had to make many adjustments in order to properly follow God's guidance.

In the Greek Septuagint, based on the contents of this book, it was given the name Numbers. In other words, when God's people were prepared to enter the wilderness, God revealed that this was actually a process of warfare; therefore, the people of Israel had to be organized into an army.

Throughout the entire Book of Numbers, there are two censuses of the army. The first one is recorded in Numbers 1:1–3, "Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: 'Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.'"

The location of the first census was in the wilderness of Sinai, after the Israelites had received the Ten Commandments and completed the construction of the Tabernacle. As for the members of the army, they were all the males twenty years old and above from each tribe of Israel, but this did not include the tribe of Levi.

What was the purpose of organizing them into an army? We must look at how the armies of Israel camped. In the wilderness, the center of the Israelites' life was the Tabernacle, because in the Tabernacle there was the presence of God; and in the Tabernacle there was the Ark of the Covenant, which was the testimony of God. Therefore, the purpose of organizing the army was to protect God's testimony.

Jacob had twelve sons, and they became the twelve tribes of Israel. Near the end of Genesis, Israel brought all his sons down to Egypt to seek refuge with Joseph. There, Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were counted as Jacob's sons and received a double portion of blessing. Therefore, Israel became thirteen tribes. Then, in the Book of Exodus, because of the incident of worshipping the golden calf, the tribe of Levi stood together with Moses. This tribe was set apart to become the tribe that served God, including the service of the Levites and the priestly service of Aaron's family.

Therefore, when the Israelites camped, the Tabernacle was the center. Aaron's family and the other three clans of Levi—Merari, Gershon, and Kohath—were around the outer court of the Tabernacle. On the east side of the Tabernacle were the tribes of Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. These three tribes were all descendants of Leah. On the west side were three tribes: Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin; these three were descendants of Rachel.

On the north side were Dan, Asher, and Naphtali; these three were the tribes that came from the maidservants. On the south side were Reuben, Simeon, and Gad; these were the sons of Leah and the sons of Leah's maidservant. This was God's special provision.

Leah had six sons, the two maidservants had four sons, and Rachel had two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, also became two tribes. Besides the twelve tribes camping around to protect the Tabernacle, inside

the Tabernacle there was the service of the priests and the service of the Levites. They were prepared in the wilderness of Sinai, organized into an army, and then began to enter the wilderness.

The entire Book of Numbers can roughly be divided into three sections: The first section is from Numbers 1:1–10:10. It describes their experience at Mount Sinai: how they were organized into an army, arranged in formation, set up their camp, prepared themselves, and then began their journey.

The second section begins from Numbers 10:11–20:22, from their departure from Mount Sinai until they reached Kadesh. This section records how the people of Israel continually sinned against God and continually rebelled against Him, a total of ten times. Because of their unbelief, God allowed them to wander in Kadesh for thirty-eight years.

The third section begins from Numbers 20:23 to the end of the book, Numbers 36:13. This section mainly takes place in the land of Moab. It describes how the older generation of Israelites died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, while the new generation of Israelites had grown up. Therefore, Moses once again proclaimed the law to the new generation of Israelites. While they were in the land of Moab, before they entered the Promised Land, there was a second census of the army. It is recorded in Numbers 26:3–4, “So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke to them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, saying: ‘Take a census of the people from twenty years old and above, as the LORD commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt.’”

If we only look at the number of Israelites organized into the army, the first census totaled 603,550, while the second totaled 601,730. The difference in number was not great. But if we carefully examine the changes in the numbers of each tribe, some increased and some decreased. Clearly, the tribe of Judah had the largest number, while the tribe of Simeon decreased by more than half. There are many spiritual lessons here, and we must carefully study the Book of Numbers to see what happened.

In this overview we cannot explain everything in detail, but we can also understand why in Moses' blessing of Israel in Deuteronomy 33, the tribe of Simeon alone was missing. After the Israelites were organized into an army for the first time, they began to move forward. Their journey along the way, and the battles they had to face, are all recorded in great detail in the Book of Numbers.

For the saints of the New Testament, in Genesis we see one spiritual example after another. Although these spiritual men of God are admirable, they are not the ultimate focus of God's heart. God's desire is for a corporate people to become the expression of God and to represent Him in ruling on the earth. In the Old Testament, God's purpose was focused on the whole nation of Israel; in the New Testament, God's purpose is focused on the church.

In the Book of Numbers, the Israelites were organized into an army; correspondingly, in the New Testament church, we are also God's soldiers. God's soldiers must put on all the spiritual armor described in Ephesians chapter 6 in order to properly fight for God. How should today's church adjust itself in order to follow God's leading? The various events recorded in the Book of Numbers provide excellent examples and warnings. If we have spiritual light, we can see from this book the service in the church, how the church should move forward, what difficulties the church will encounter, and how the church should deal with these difficulties. All of these things are hidden in the Book of Numbers.

Thank the Lord, under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, when Moses wrote the Book of Numbers, he specially added Numbers chapter 33. This chapter records all the stopping places they passed through from the time they left Egypt until they reached the plains of Moab. If you carefully count them, there are exactly 42 stopping places. This speaks of every stage a church must pass through as it follows God's leading.

The number 42 is a very special number. In the Bible, there are at least three occurrences of 42. The first 42 is in Numbers chapter 33—the 42 stations in the wilderness. This speaks of God preparing the people of Israel, after leaving Egypt,

to enter the Promised Land. It describes the experiences they needed to pass through in the wilderness as they were being prepared to enter the good land.

The second 42 is in Matthew chapter 1, which speaks of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. From Abraham to Christ, there are a total of 42 generations. In the Gospel of Matthew, these 42 generations are divided into three groups of fourteen generations: From Abraham to David, fourteen generations; from David's reign until the captivity and the exile to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the captivity in Babylon until Christ, fourteen generations.

The first fourteen generations speak of the patriarchs, which foreshadow the Father's purpose. The second fourteen generations, beginning with David until the captivity, are the generations of kings, speaking of the execution of the Son's work. The third fourteen generations, after the captivity, became ordinary people, quietly speaking of the supply and leading of the Spirit in our lives.

The third 42 in the Bible is found in the book of Revelation, at the end of this age—the final 42 months of the great tribulation. These 42 months will bring the present world to an end and usher in the millennial kingdom. The number 42 speaks of God's preparation, enabling people to enter into the next stage: The 42 stations in the wilderness prepared the people to enter the Promised Land; the 42 generations in Matthew prepared all nations to receive Christ; the 42 months in Revelation prepare the world for the millennial kingdom.

According to the principle of the three groups of fourteen generations in Matthew, it seems that we may also divide the 42 stations in the wilderness into three stages, according to the stopping places listed in Numbers chapter 33.

The first fourteen stations were from Rameses until Hazeroth. During this stage, Israel—or today's church—experienced the Father's various heavenly blessings. This is also the beginning of our spiritual life. We passed through the Red Sea, and Pharaoh's pursuing army was drowned in the sea. We also entered the wilderness and received the daily supply of manna. And because Jesus Christ, the Rock, was struck, water flowed out and supplied us.

At the same time, during this stage, God brought us to the wilderness of Sinai, where they remained for one year. There they received the Ten Commandments and began to build the Tabernacle. Through the law, we come to know what God is; through the Tabernacle, we come to know God's desire—to dwell with mankind. During this period, the Levites were set apart for service, allowing us to understand that God's work must be holy and absolute. Finally, when the Tabernacle was completed, the glory of God filled the Tabernacle, allowing us to see the glory of God's testimony.

The second fourteen stations were from Rithmah to Bene Jaakan. During this stage, we together experience the being and the work of the Son. Our life also gradually grows through the daily enjoyment of God's word. Every Christian, during this period, continually experiences how to put off the old man and how to put on the new man. During this stage, we see the unbelief of the ten spies, which caused the people of Israel to wander in the wilderness for thirty-eight years. It may appear to be a waste, yet it was an unavoidable spiritual experience.

During this stage, we also see the rebellion of Korah's company, and how God severely dealt with those who rebelled. The bronze from the censers carried by those who rebelled became plates covering the altar. This speaks of how every time we come to the altar to offer sacrifices, we must come with the light of judgment, receive God's grace, and experience God's mercy.

Even toward the rebellious sons of Korah, God still showed special mercy, so that in the Psalms we find songs from the descendants of Korah. The descendants of Korah experienced God's particularly severe judgment. They knew that their survival was completely because of God's mercy, and therefore they became a group of people especially skilled in singing praises. During this stage, we also see the ashes of the red heifer being made into water for purification from sin. During this stage, we learn how to deal with our flesh.

The third fourteen stations were from Mount Hor until the plains of Moab. During this stage, we experience the Spirit's complete supply and His work within us. Our life gradually matures through God's leading and through our subjective experience

of Him. During this stage, we experienced the death of Miriam, the death of Aaron, and the failure of Moses. This stage also shows us that the first generation of Israelites all died in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb. They brought the second generation of Israelites and prepared to enter the Promised Land.

This speaks of the fact that during this stage, the old man is crucified with Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Galatians 2:20, NKJV) This speaks of a Christian maturing to the point of overcoming the self.

Throughout the entire Book of Numbers, there are many more types and shadows of Christ that we cannot explain one by one. But among them, the bronze serpent is recorded in John 3:14, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Thank the Lord for giving us such a rich book—the Book of Numbers—so that we may know how the church should move forward.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. The church is Your Body; it is the object of Your care and nourishment. The advancement of the church is the desire of Your heart. Thank You for giving us the Book of Numbers, allowing us to learn from it how the saints in the church may, in one accord and one mind, receive all the heavenly blessings from the Father, receive the effectiveness brought by the Son through the cross, put our flesh to death, and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in the church. May the church be according to Your heart’s desire and become Your beautiful testimony. Bless the church where I am. I pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.