

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

**Num. 1: 47-54**

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 1. Today we read verses 47 to 54.

On the night of the Passover, which was the fourteenth day of the first month according to the Jewish calendar, Moses led the congregation of more than two million Israelites out of Egypt. Three months later, they came to the wilderness of Sinai. There, Moses went up Mount Sinai and received the law and the blueprint for building the tabernacle. Then Moses led the congregation of Israel to build the tabernacle according to the pattern God had revealed on the mountain, so that God could dwell among the Israelites.

This building process took nearly eight and a half months. Exodus 40:17 says, "And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up." Exodus 40:33 says, "And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work." After the tabernacle had been erected, the result was that the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle, so that even Moses was unable to enter it.

God then called to Moses from the tabernacle and revealed to him the details concerning offerings, worship, and service. These revelations are recorded in Leviticus. The whole book of Leviticus consists of God's speaking. This speaking continued for one month, and Moses faithfully recorded it all and conveyed it to the congregation of Israel. This brings us to the first day of the second month in the second year, which is the beginning of Numbers.

God spoke to Moses and told him to number, among the twelve tribes of Israel, the men twenty years old and above who were able to go to war. They were to be numbered one by one according to their families, their fathers' houses, and the

number of names. Among the twelve tribes, there were altogether 603,550 men. In human governments, a census is a very common matter, because only after the total population has been established can laws and policies concerning taxation, conscription, and labor allocation be formulated. But in Numbers, we are clearly told that God took the initiative to speak to Moses and command him to number the men so that they could be organized into an army. This was entirely initiated by God. Even the leaders of the tribes were appointed by God.

In fact, throughout the entire Old Testament, only three numberings of the army are recorded. The first two are recorded in Numbers. The first is here in Numbers chapter 1, which we are now reading. The people of Israel were to be organized into an army, begin their journey through the wilderness, and protect God's testimony.

The second numbering is in Numbers chapter 26. Once again, God took the initiative to speak to Moses and command him to number the army anew. By that time, most of the first generation of Israelites had fallen in the wilderness, and the second generation was about to enter the good land. God wanted Moses to count the men again so that, after they entered the good land, the inheritance could be distributed according to the number of those who had been counted. Both of these numberings of the army were carried out under God's sovereignty; Moses simply obeyed His command.

The third record of numbering the army is in 2 Samuel chapter 24, which was already during the time of King David. David wanted to know the number of the people of Israel, so he ordered Joab, the commander of the army, to count the people. This matter greatly offended God. The same event is recorded in 1 Chronicles 21:1, "Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel." As a result, God prepared three disasters and allowed David to choose among them: three years of famine, three months of being pursued by the sword of his enemies, or three days of plague.

Only then did David understand that numbering the people had violated God's sovereignty. In 1 Chronicles 21:13, he said, "I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into

the hand of man.” As a result, God sent a plague for three days, and seventy thousand Israelites died. Yet God caused all things to work together. It was precisely because David acted greatly in the flesh and numbered the army, and because God sent the plague, that the place where the plague was stopped became the future site of the temple. This reminds us that, at the site of the temple, man’s flesh must be stopped.

For the New Testament saints, this also reminds us that when we handle matters concerning the church, we must restrain the flesh and not use the methods of the world to handle spiritual matters. In everything, we must seek God’s will and respect God’s sovereignty.

In the modern church, the method of “user pays” is often used, or a “responsibility system” is used to share the practical affairs of the church. Therefore, the number of people is always counted first, and then the responsibility each person should bear is calculated. We need to recognize that this is a worldly principle for handling matters, and this should not be what the church does.

The church has always operated according to the principle of grace. When a person feels that he has received more grace, he will naturally give more thanks and offer more. Only God knows the true number of people in the church. May the Lord have mercy on us and keep us from focusing on the number of people in the church. Only under the arrangement of God’s sovereignty may we count the people, with the purpose that the church may be organized into an army in a more orderly way to protect God’s testimony. After Moses numbered the twelve tribes, he then proceeded to deal with the tribe of Levi.

**Verses 47-49: “But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers’ tribe; for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: ‘Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel;’”**

The numbering of the children of Israel was under God’s sovereignty. When God commanded Moses to number, among the twelve tribes, the men twenty years old and above who were able to go to war, Moses carried out God’s command. But the

Levites were not included among these twelve tribes. God specifically spoke to Moses and told him not to number the tribe of Levi nor include their total among the children of Israel, because the tribe of Levi had been set apart to God, and God had a special arrangement for them.

Dear brothers and sisters, every person who has received grace and been saved is willing to offer himself and serve out of gratitude to God. This is very good, but it is not enough. Every saint must be led by God to the point of realizing that he has been completely set apart unto God and belongs to Him. Perhaps when we are young, we still carry various responsibilities: we need to work and support our families. This is also the time when we should properly learn to serve. Until one day, when God's calling comes to us, we will be able to lay everything down and follow Him. At that time, we belong completely to the Lord, and others have no authority to number us. Like the Levites in relation to the other twelve tribes, we are a tribe set apart by God to serve Him.

**Verse 50: "but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle."**

In this verse, God spoke to Moses concerning the duties of the Levites: the Levites were to be appointed over the tabernacle of the Testimony. From Exodus, we know that the tabernacle included the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, and the outer court. In the Most Holy Place was the ark of the Testimony, also called the ark of the covenant. It was the most important object in the entire tabernacle, because it was the place where God met with man. Therefore, the tabernacle was also called the tabernacle of the Testimony.

The Levites were set apart to manage all matters related to the tabernacle of the Testimony, including all the furnishings in the tabernacle. In the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant. In the Holy Place were the golden altar of incense, the golden lampstand, and the table of showbread. In the outer court were the laver and the bronze altar. All these furnishings were the means by which man offered

sacrifices to God and could be accepted by Him. Therefore, they had to be kept holy at all times.

God specifically commanded Moses to make the holy anointing oil. Exodus 30:26-29 says, "With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy." Here we see that not only were these objects to be anointed with the holy anointing oil so that they would become most holy, but these objects could also make whatever touched them holy.

Therefore, not every Israelite could touch these objects. Only the tribe of Levi was set apart to manage the tabernacle, all the furnishings in the tabernacle, and all things belonging to the tabernacle, that is, everything related to the tabernacle. God's command here was very detailed. This tells us that serving and worshiping God is no small matter.

The tabernacle in the wilderness was movable. It was to lead the entire congregation of Israel through the wilderness and into the good land of Canaan. Carrying the tabernacle and its furnishings was also the responsibility of the Levites. They were to attend to all matters related to the tabernacle. They were also to camp around the tabernacle. Their living and movements were centered on the tabernacle. They lived for the tabernacle, and the tabernacle was the mission of their entire lives.

Dear brothers and sisters, today the church is still in the wilderness of the world. The church has been called by Christ to move continually forward, or more accurately, continually upward. Only when Christ returns and the whole church is raptured will the heavenly journey be completed. In this process, God also wants to organize the church into an army to uphold the testimony of Christ in a crooked and perverse generation. God especially values the holiness of the church. The strong saints in the church who are mature in life and able to fight for God must be counted and become good soldiers of Christ; they must protect God's testimony.

In the church, the duties of worship and service must also be set apart and carried out by the Levites.

Therefore, traditional Christianity established the priestly system or the pastoral system. Clergy members were assigned full-time responsibility for matters of worship in the church and for arranging and distributing service. They believed that ordinary laypeople could not touch God's holy work. To a certain extent, this seemed to preserve the holiness of the church. However, in church history, we have seen the corruption that resulted after clergy members monopolized authority.

The Reformation initiated by Martin Luther in 1517 arose because he could not tolerate the church's sale of indulgences. At that time, the church placed a price on the freely given grace of Jesus Christ and sold it. This completely violated the truth of the Bible. However, after the Reformation, the pastoral system replaced the priestly system. This did not completely resolve the problem of clergy monopolizing authority.

If we truly seek God's will concerning the church, it is actually very clear in the Bible. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Here Peter clearly tells every saint who has received grace and been saved that all are specially chosen by God, all are citizens of God's kingdom, and all are royal priests who must together testify of the excellencies of Christ.

Here we see that God has given the church what seems to be an impossible task: God wants every saint to participate in service and to become a priest. At the same time, the standard cannot be lowered; the holiness that the church should have must be maintained. Therefore, in order to fulfill God's will and commission for the church, we must introduce the concept of growth in life. In the church, authority based on the level of growth in life must be established, and the saints must be given opportunities to participate in various services so that they may grow in life and be perfected in their gifts.

In this process, every saint who participates in service must recognize his own unworthiness, do his utmost to maintain his holiness in service, and treat every

service with a serious attitude, fearing that his own shortcomings might damage God's testimony. Therefore, he must frequently examine himself and, through confession and cleansing, enable himself to serve God with clean hands and a pure heart.

In this way, every saint who has received grace and been saved will have the opportunity, through growth in life, to become a good soldier who can protect God's testimony, then to become a Levite who can attend to the affairs of the tabernacle, and finally to become a priest who can bring people before God. When we come to chapters 3 through 8 and discuss the service of the Levites and the priests, we will develop these details more fully.

**Verse 51: "And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death."**

The tabernacle in the wilderness was movable. When the tabernacle was to move forward, the Levites were responsible for taking it down. When the tabernacle stopped, the Levites were to raise it and were responsible for setting it up. These objects used in serving and worshiping God were most holy. Only those who had been specially set apart and equipped could handle them. If an outsider came near, he was to be put to death. In today's terms, this means that touching the spiritual service of the church with a careless attitude will bring spiritual death. Therefore, the saints must treat their service with fear and trembling, lest our negligence damage the testimony of the church and cause us to suffer spiritual loss.

**Verse 52: "The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies;"**

The twelve tribes in the congregation of Israel were to pitch their tents according to their armies. Everyone was to return to his own camp and to his own standard; the standard was the great banner of the army. Here we once again see God's precision and order. God first established a leader in every tribe, then organized

every tribe into an army. Every Israelite was to pitch his tent within the tribe to which he belonged. God also arranged three tribes to guard one side of the tabernacle, and these three tribes had one military banner. We will read about these things in the next chapter.

Therefore, every Israelite had to recognize where he belonged, under which military banner he stood, and to which tribe he belonged. When every Israelite respected his source and belonging, the congregation of two million Israelites was no longer a disorderly mob, but a disciplined army capable of moving. The saints in the church today are the same. They must respect the source and background of their salvation and live under the order of life.

**Verse 53: “but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”**

The Levites were to stand between the army of Israel and the tabernacle and camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, lest the Israelites mistakenly enter the tabernacle and bring God’s wrath upon the congregation of Israel. Here we see that the army of Israel protected God’s testimony from the disturbance of outsiders, while the Levites preserved the holiness of the tabernacle, lest careless Israelites mistakenly enter it and bring God’s wrath upon themselves. Keeping charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony and maintaining its holiness were the responsibilities of the Levites.

**Verse 54: “Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they did.”**

This verse is the conclusion of chapter 1. God commanded Moses to organize the Israelites into an army and to have the Levites maintain the holiness of the tabernacle. Moses heard and gave the same instructions to the Israelites. According to all that the LORD commanded Moses, the Israelites did. Although this chapter

records the words God spoke to Moses 3,500 years ago, they still apply to the church today.

The tabernacle was holy, and in the same way, the church is holy. The tabernacle had to move through the wilderness, and in the same way, the church must move forward in today's world. At that time, the tabernacle needed an army to protect it; today, the testimony of the church likewise needs the good soldiers of Christ to guard it. The holiness of the tabernacle needed the Levites to maintain it; in the same way, every saint who touches matters of service in the church today must be a Levite who has been set apart unto God. When the church is not holy, God's wrath will come; when the church has no army to guard it, God's testimony will be damaged. May the Lord have mercy on us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for speaking to us once again through Numbers. Today, in the church, You desire to raise up good soldiers of Christ, raise up Levites who are set apart unto You, and maintain the holiness and testimony of the church. Bless the church where I am, so that according to Your will for the church, it may be built up as a church that takes Christ as the Head, is full of the order and authority of life, and can bear testimony for God in its locality. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.