

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

Numbers 3:11-20

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 3; today we will read verses 11-20.

Yesterday we read that God instructed Moses, Aaron, and his sons to serve in the priest's office, and the entire tribe of Levi was to assist the priests in managing the affairs of the tabernacle. We must recognize God's perfect will; originally, He intended for the chosen people of the Old Testament—the entire congregation of Israel—to all become priests and serve God. However, the Israelites fell and failed, losing their ministry to serve God, which is why God then chose the family of Aaron from the tribe of Levi to serve Him. Aaron was the high priest, and Aaron's sons were all priests; God commanded them to carefully keep their priesthood. To help the priests minister appropriately, God further chose the tribe of Levi to assist them in managing the matters of the tabernacle.

Verses 11-12: “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine.’”

God chose the tribe of Levi from among the Israelites to take the place of all the firstborn among them; the Levites were set apart unto God to become the tribe that serves Him because they took the place of all the firstborn of Israel. Here, God reveals a very important concept: all the firstborn among the Israelites should be set apart and given to God; this was true in the Old Testament, and it remains the same in the New Testament.

The church is God's New Testament people. Therefore, God also reveals that every person who is saved by grace should set apart all their firstborn—that is, the best portion of what they possess—unto God. This includes their best time, their best abilities, their best experiences, and their best assets; in other words, we ourselves and the best parts of

what we have should all be dedicated to God. It is only when people fail to keep up that God permits a special intermediary class to temporarily take their place; God's allowance for the emergence of clergy and hierarchical structures is His permissive will, not His perfect will.

Therefore, Paul tells us very clearly in Ephesians 4:11-13 that God's purpose in giving gifts to the church is not to replace the saints in serving God, but rather to use these gifts to equip the saints. This enables every saint to do their part, building up the body of Christ together, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. God's perfect will is for every saint to grow up and serve Him directly. Thus, we must all offer our best to God and learn to serve Him until our lives mature, our gifts are perfected, and we can fulfill our ministry according to God's heart.

Verse 13: “because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the Lord.”

In this verse, God reveals why all the firstborn of the Israelites should belong to Him. Originally, when the Israelites were slaves in the land of Egypt, God sent Moses to deliver them. Because the Pharaoh of Egypt refused to let the Israelites go, God brought down ten plagues through the hands of Moses, each progressively more severe. The tenth plague was the heaviest: God would strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, including the firstborn sons and the firstborn livestock. Only for the Israelite households that had smeared lamb's blood on the lintels and doorposts did the destroying angel pass over, which is the origin of the Passover. In other words, the firstborn in the Israelite households, both man and beast, were originally meant to be killed, but they were substituted by the lamb. Therefore, their lives belong to God and should be sanctified unto Him.

Speaking from the typology of the New Testament, every one of us originally lived in slavery to sin and the world; we could not free ourselves from the bondage of slavery on our own, and we were completely without hope. Jesus Christ is the sinless lamb who paid

the price of sin in our place, redeeming us so that we can be freed from the bondage of sin and the world. Since our lives were bought and redeemed by the life of the Lamb, we should no longer belong to ourselves, but should be set apart unto God. Here we see that God's plan of redemption had already been revealed to us through the Pentateuch as early as the time of Moses.

Verses 14-16: “Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: ‘Number the children of Levi by their fathers’ houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above.’ So Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord, as he was commanded.”

The Lord again spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, instructing him to number the Israelites, counting all the Levite males from a month old and above according to their clans and fathers' houses. In chapters one and two, we saw that the Israelites were to be numbered and organized into an army. At the same time, in Numbers 1:48-49, God specifically commanded that the tribe of Levi must not be numbered because they had other important duties and could not be drafted into the army. Now, God commands Moses to number the males of the tribe of Levi, and once again, it is to be done according to their clans and fathers' houses. This shows that God is a God of order and respects human origins; this point is exactly the same as when they were organized into an army, but the difference here is the numbering of males from a month old and above.

This is very unique. Remember that when organizing the army, numbering the Israelites meant counting those from twenty years old and above who were able to go to war. One must grow to a certain stature for battle before being counted; however, the Levites were to be counted as long as they were a month old and above. Within the first month, it was uncertain whether the infant would survive; beyond a month, the infant could survive, so he was to be counted. This signifies that the child's entire life belongs to the Lord, and the Lord will take full responsibility for him. Although priests and Levites could only begin serving after the age of thirty, they were to be numbered from one month old and above, becoming people who belong to the Lord. The child's parents had to nurture him

according to the responsibilities he would bear in the future, until his life was mature and he reached thirty, at which point he would begin his service.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you see that once you believe in Jesus Christ and receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, you possess a divine life from God? This life may still be immature, but you are already someone who belongs to God. Of course, you need to be nurtured; you must know God more and know His word until your equipping in the truth and the perfecting of your gifts reach maturity, allowing you to begin your service. The best nurturing and perfecting is to learn to serve in the church immediately after baptism. Life grows through learning, and gifts are perfected through learning. Our ministry will naturally become evident when our lives and gifts are seasoned; at that time, we will be able to fulfill our ministry according to God's calling. After hearing God's command, Moses numbered all the males of the tribe of Levi from a month old and above, just as God had instructed.

Verse 17: “These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.”

Levi perfectly had three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. We read earlier that when the Israelites camped, the twelve tribes were divided precisely into four camps guarding the surroundings of the tabernacle. The camp of Judah was on the east, the camp of Reuben on the south, the camp of Ephraim on the west, and the camp of Dan on the north. The Levites were positioned between these four camps and the tabernacle to prevent the Israelites from accidentally trespassing into the tabernacle and provoking God's wrath. Levi perfectly had three sons who could camp on the west, south, and north sides of the tabernacle, preventing the congregations of the camps of Ephraim, Reuben, and Dan from inadvertently wandering into it. The most important position on the east was reserved for Moses and the sons of Aaron, preventing the congregation of the camp of Judah from trespassing into the tabernacle. What a perfect arrangement this is.

Jacob originally had twelve sons. Later, Joseph's two sons also became Jacob's sons because they were to receive a double portion of the land. The purpose behind this was because the tribe of Levi was to be set apart to serve God; the remaining twelve sons could be perfectly divided into four camps to guard the surroundings of the tabernacle.

Meanwhile, the separated tribe of Levi, through Levi's three sons, perfectly guarded the west, south, and north sides of the tabernacle. The eastern entrance of the tabernacle was entrusted to Moses and the sons of Aaron from the tribe of Levi to guard. Seeing such a flawless arrangement, we must admit that God's hand is in control of everything. It is just as Paul said when he preached the gospel to the Athenians in Acts 17:26, "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,"

If we truly know God and have experienced His lovingkindness and grace, what great assurance we will have for our life's journey. This does not mean we will not encounter tribulations and dangers, but rather that all of this is in the hands of the God who loves us, so we need not worry or fret. The poet Anna Waring wrote a beautiful hymn in her twenties, and the first stanza conveys this: "Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me; And the changes that are sure to come, I do not fear to see; But I ask Thee for a present mind, Intent on pleasing Thee." It turns out that since our entire lives are held in God's hands, we can peacefully face all sorts of changes. What we need to ask God to guard is our heart, so that we remain ever faithful to the Lord; our only hope is to bring joy to Him.

Verses 18-20: "And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei. And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their fathers' houses."

The Levites were set apart to assist the priests in serving God, and the descendants born of Levi's three sons all had special ministries. God named them one by one, remembering every father's house within the tribe of Levi. Gershon had two sons, and by their families, they were Libni and Shimei. Kohath had four sons, and by their families, they were Amram, Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel. We know that Moses and Aaron were both sons of Amram. Merari had two sons, and by their families, they were Mahli and Mushi. These families were all derived from the clans of Levi.

Dear brothers and sisters, our birth, our spiritual growth, the perfecting of our gifts, and the ministries we will have in the church have actually all been prepared by God long ago. What we must ask of God is to truly know ourselves and, according to the ministry God has assigned to us, coordinate with all the saints to build up the body of Jesus Christ together. May God help us.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You that we have received grace. It is entirely because of Your free grace that through faith, our sins are forgiven, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we attain eternal life. You also command us that in the process of following You, our lives must grow, our gifts must be perfected, and we must ultimately accomplish the commission You have given us. Help us to know ourselves and be willing to understand the commission You have given us through learning in ministry. Help us to live our entire lives within Your will. Bless the path ahead of me. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.