

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

Numbers 3: 40-51

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 3. Today we read from verse 40 to verse 51.

The total number of males from the tribe of Levi one month old and above who were numbered was 22,000. This number already excluded the firstborn males from the tribe of Levi, totaling 300. The purpose of subtracting this number was to have them substitute for all the firstborn males among the entire tribe of Israel.

Verse 40: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses: 'Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names.'"

The phrase "the LORD spoke to Moses" appears repeatedly. Moses was God's servant, faithful in all God's household. Everything he did was according to God's command. This is also the attitude and practice that saints should have today when serving the church, because the church is God's house, the place where God's will can be carried out without hindrance. If anyone forcibly adds his own ideas and ways, it will interrupt God's will. Therefore, a servant who is after God's heart is one who often prays and inquires before God, and who is willing to act completely according to God's command.

We know that God's commands to people are recorded in the entire Bible. Therefore, we should read the Bible chapter by chapter and verse by verse, trying to understand what God commands us to do today through the Scriptures. God commanded Moses to number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from one month old and above, and to record their names.

In Numbers chapters 1 and 2, when organizing the Israelites into an army, God commanded Moses to number the males twenty years old and above from the twelve tribes who were able to go out to war. However, what was to be numbered here was all the firstborn males from one month old and above. "One month old and above" means the male infant was able to survive, and only the firstborn male in each family was numbered. When God commanded Moses to number the males, it was not only recording a figure, but recording each name one by one on the register. God never looks only at numbers, but at the people each number represents.

Therefore, we must never belittle ourselves. God values every person who belongs to Him. Jesus said in John 10:3-4 that He is the good shepherd; He calls His own sheep by name, and the sheep hear His voice. Dear brothers and sisters, from the Lord Jesus' side, He calls His own sheep by name. But when Jesus Christ calls your name, can you recognize that it is the Lord's voice? If we are not familiar with the Lord, how can we know it is the Lord's voice? Therefore we must have some time for spiritual exercise every day, and listen to the Lord's voice while reading the Bible.

God wanted Moses to record every firstborn male in each family among the Israelites. Perhaps you may ask why. The answer is in Exodus 13:2, "Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine." This was what the LORD said to Moses after the first Passover. During the Passover, all the firstborn males and livestock in every household throughout the land of Egypt were struck down. Only when the lintel and doorposts of the houses of Israel were smeared with the blood of the lamb were they passed over by the destroying angel. That is to say, the firstborn sons and livestock in the houses of Israel were originally subject to death, but they were replaced by the lamb that died in their places in stead. It was God who saved their lives; therefore, they should belong to the LORD.

Then it is recorded in Exodus 13:14-15, "So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to

pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’” This was to become the heritage of the Israelites: the firstborn son belongs to God, and the firstborn livestock must be offered to God.

Verse 41: “And you shall take the Levites for Me—I am the Lord—instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel.””

“I am the LORD,” which English versions translate as “I am the Lord.” When God declared this, it was God, in His sovereignty, re-establishing His arrangement for His people. We have said before that God’s will has two aspects: God’s best will and God’s permissive will. From the beginning, God had already established His best will. But because of man’s rebellion and fall, God’s permissive will came forth. This is God considering man’s weakness, allowing man to take a roundabout way. But ultimately, it must return to God’s best will.

We know that in Exodus chapter 32, the incident of worshiping the golden calf occurred. At that time, only the descendants of Levi stood with Moses and cleansed the uncleanness among the Israelites. From then on, the tribe of Levi was to be set apart to become the tribe that serves God. God’s best will was for the whole house of Israel to serve God, but since the Israelites could not keep up, the tribe of Levi temporarily substituted for the Israelites to serve God.

Paul says this in Romans 11:25-27, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’” Paul clearly tells us that at the end of the age, the remaining Israelites will all be saved as a whole family. God will remove their sins, and the whole house of Israel will rise up to serve God.

However, before the time is fulfilled, God's new regulation for the Israelites was to choose the Levites for God. The Levites were to substitute for all the firstborn of the Israelites; they were to be set apart for God. Originally all the firstborn livestock among the Israelites were to be offered to God; now these firstborn livestock were to be given to the Levites, and the livestock of the Levites were to substitute for all the firstborn livestock of Israel. The Levites were set apart to substitute for the Israelites to serve God, so the Israelites naturally should take care of the needs in the Levites' daily life. The Levites belong to God, so their livestock naturally also belong to God. This does not violate God's best will; rather, in God's permissive will, God gave the Israelites enough time and space so that ultimately, through God's grace, they would return to God's best will.

Verses 42-43: "So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three."

Moses, according to what the LORD commanded, numbered all the firstborn males from one month old and above among the twelve tribes of Israel. Not only were the numbers listed, but each name was also listed one by one, totaling 22,273. Why did God record the names and numbers so precisely? Because in God's plan of redemption, it must be precise enough that every person who receives grace and is saved must be accounted for, so that no one misses the grace of redemption. In 1 Timothy 2:4, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." In 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

God truly desires everyone to repent and everyone to be saved; God truly does not want anyone to perish. And those who are willing to believe, repent, and be saved, God regards as treasures. He not only records the numbers but also records their names. Among the twelve tribes of Israel there were 22,273 firstborn males, while

among the tribe of Levi the males one month old and above were 22,000. There were 273 extra firstborn males among the Israelites, and there were no Levites to substitute for these 273. Then God told Moses how to handle this problem.

Verses 44-45: “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I am the LORD.’”

Before formally handling this problem, God declared once again: God chooses the Levites to substitute for all the firstborn among the Israelites, the livestock of the Levites substitute for the livestock of the Israelites, and the Levites are to belong to God. “I am the LORD.” The wording here is almost exactly the same as verse 41, except that “I am the LORD” (or “I am the Lord”) is placed at the end of the sentence. This emphasizes once again that it was arranged under God’s sovereign authority. There is rarely redundant repetition in the Bible. When God declares this way twice in succession, and adds “I am the LORD” both at the beginning and at the end of the sentence, it shows how much God values this matter. Because the plan of redemption is the core of God’s will, the accuracy and precision of the plan of redemption cannot have the slightest error. Next we will see how God handled this problem.

Verse 46: “And for the redemption of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites,”

After excluding the firstborn males, the tribe of Levi had a total of 22,000. They could substitute for 22,000 firstborn males from the other twelve tribes of Israel. But among the Israelites there were 273 extra firstborn males for whom there were no Levites to substitute. God said they must be redeemed. The Hebrew word for “redeem” is *paduwy*, used in the passive voice, which in English is “to be redeemed.” This passive usage of the word appears only four times in the entire Old Testament, and all four times are in this section of Numbers 3:46-51. These

extra 273 people must be redeemed; God did not abandon them. God specially made redemption regulations for them. Dear brothers and sisters, we must be deeply impressed by God's precision and certainty in the plan of redemption. God is not careless at all. God does not abandon the extra people, but instead establishes precise regulations to redeem these extra ones.

Verse 47: "you shall take five shekels for each one individually; you shall take them in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of twenty gerahs."

For each of the extra males, five shekels of silver were to be used to redeem them. A shekel is a unit of weight; one shekel is twenty gerahs. One gerah was the smallest unit of weight at that time, equivalent to the weight of about sixteen grains of barley. The silver circulating in the market at that time was often short in weight. Therefore, God specifically required that it be weighed according to the shekel of the sanctuary; it must be accurate five shekels. God's repeated emphasis on weight shows how much God cares about the precision of redemption.

"Five" is the number of responsibility, indicating that in the matter of redemption God bears full responsibility, represented by five shekels. It is also one hundred percent salvation, represented by one hundred gerahs. God's grace never has any discount.

Verse 48: "And you shall give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons."

The 273 extra people were each to be redeemed with five shekels of silver. The redemption money was to be given to Aaron and his sons. Aaron was the high priest, and Aaron's sons were priests. These priests were to assist the high priest in serving God under the management and supervision of the high priest. The three major families of the tribe of Levi were all to be given to the priests to help the priests serve God. The tribe of Levi also substituted for all the firstborn sons among

the twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore, according to this logic, the redemption money that the extra people had to pay naturally also went to Aaron and his sons; each person was to use five shekels of silver as the redemption price.

This clearly tells us that redemption requires a price to be paid. In the New Testament period, we often emphasize that redemption is free grace; as long as one is willing to believe and accept, one can receive it. This causes some people who do not understand to mistakenly think that redemption is cheap. Of course, redemption is free grace to those who receive it. It is not only free grace; in fact, people cannot pay any price to obtain the grace of redemption. But from God's side, it requires an extremely heavy price. God sacrificed His only begotten beloved Son; for every person who receives grace and is saved, He pays the price of five shekels so that people can be saved one hundred percent. Every person's salvation is fully God's responsibility.

Let us think: how many sinners throughout the ages and in all places have received grace and been saved? This account is all charged to Jesus. Therefore, when Jesus bore our sins on the cross and was judged by God, Jesus cried out loudly, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus truly paid an extremely heavy price to redeem you and me. In typology, on the one hand Jesus is the sin-offering lamb who bore our sins; on the other hand, He is the high priest who offers the sacrifice. Therefore, every person who receives grace and is saved should belong to Jesus Christ, because He is our High Priest.

Verses 49-50: "So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those who were redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the children of Israel he took the money, one thousand three hundred and sixty-five shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary."

Moses listened to God's command and did accordingly. He took the redemption money from the 273 people who were beyond those redeemed by the Levites. How to determine which of the 22,273 firstborn were the extra 273? These people had to pay five shekels of silver. God did not explain in detail, and Moses did not ask,

but Moses seemed to know what to do. Moses did it accordingly. Most commentators appeal to the tradition of the Israelites, which was to select these 273 people by casting lots. This was a custom among the Israelites in the Old Testament; when they were unsure what God's will was, they used lots to decide.

But we must recognize that the traditions of the Israelites do not necessarily conform to God's will, because it was under their tradition that they killed Jesus Christ who came to save them. I believe God gave Moses the authority to collect the redemption money, and Moses knew how to collect it in the way that best conformed to God's heart. Perhaps he already had public funds collected from the houses of Israel in his hand that could be used to pay these prices; perhaps he would set up a special fund and ask capable and willing Israelites to contribute.

Since the Bible does not specify the details but says that Moses knew what to do, in today's church life it is the same. For the things we should do, God will give very clear guidance. As for how to do that thing, the serving saints must learn to seek the way that best conforms to God's will. For different groups, God may use different ways; there is no need to unify them. But what must be certain is that it must conform to the principle of God's righteousness and fairness. For the extra 273 firstborn Israelites, Moses collected five shekels each according to the shekel of the sanctuary, totaling 1,365 shekels—nothing more, nothing less. This is an extremely important principle in God's plan of redemption: the required redemption price must be paid in full according to God's regulation before people can be redeemed.

Verse 51: "And Moses gave their redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the Lord, as the Lord commanded Moses."

Moses, according to the word of the LORD, collected the redemption money that was required, totaling 1,365 shekels, and gave this redemption money to Aaron and his sons.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that from today's Scripture we can clearly see that redemption is free grace to us. For God, He truly had to pay the required price for every sinner to be redeemed; in the Old Testament it was five shekels of silver. In the New Testament, Peter, following this Old Testament picture, tells us even more clearly. In 1 Peter 1:18-19: "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Jesus bore the redemption price of life for us. This redemption price is five shekels for each person, showing that God bears full responsibility; it is also one hundred gerahs, showing that the effectiveness of redemption is one hundred percent and our sins are completely forgiven. For every person who has received grace and is saved, Paul further tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Therefore, we must recognize that we have all been bought with a heavy price; we no longer belong to ourselves, but we belong to the Lord.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. Through the pictures in the Old Testament, You let us see the preciousness of redemption even more clearly. To us it is free grace; to Jesus Christ, it truly required paying the price of life to buy us back, so that we can wholly belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Because He is our High Priest, help us to know the preciousness of redemption and also stir us up to glorify God in our bodies. That is, in every matter we encounter in our daily life, we can remember that we are not our own, we are not in control of ourselves, but we follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. In everything we do, we can testify of God and glorify God. Bless my life today. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.