

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

Numbers 5:1-4

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we're going to read Numbers chapter 5. Today we'll read verses 1-4.

In Exodus 25:8, God told Moses why the tabernacle was to be built. Verse 8 says: "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." God desired to dwell among His chosen people; therefore, He instructed Moses to build the tabernacle. However, God is so holy, righteous, and glorious, while mankind is so defiled, unrighteous, and sinful. How, then, could God dwell among men?

Therefore, after the tabernacle was completed, God spoke to Moses from within it. He first revealed the ordinances concerning the sacrifices and consecrated the priests to their holy office. Through the substitutionary death of the sacrificial animals, the problem of sin could be dealt with temporarily. Only then could the high priest bear the people of Israel upon himself and enter the Most Holy Place once each year to meet God before the mercy seat. Afterward, God also revealed the dietary laws and the laws concerning ceremonial cleanness so that the Israelites might remain clean and not offend the holy God.

God spent one month speaking to Moses, and Moses faithfully recorded these words. They are what we now have in the Book of Leviticus. During that month, two significant events took place. The first occurred in Leviticus 8 and 9, when Aaron was consecrated as high priest through the offering of sacrifices. Immediately afterward, Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered profane fire before the Lord and were struck dead by God. This clearly demonstrates that God's holiness cannot be violated. Especially for those priests responsible for offering sacrifices, when they sinned, God did not overlook their offense.

The second event took place in Leviticus 16, where God established the ordinances for the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. Aaron first had to offer a sin offering for

himself and for his household. Only afterward could he present the sin offering on behalf of the people of Israel. Here we see that God clearly revealed His law, teaching the Israelites what they should do and what they should not do, and showing them how restitution and atonement were to be made whenever they did what ought not to be done.

One month later came the first day of the second month in the second year after the Exodus, marking the beginning of the Book of Numbers. The Book of Numbers is filled with God's leading in action. Before setting out into the wilderness on the journey toward the Promised Land, God first numbered the twelve tribes of Israel and organized them into an army. With the tabernacle at the center, the three tribes of the camp of Judah were stationed on the east, the three tribes of the camp of Reuben on the south, the three tribes of the camp of Ephraim on the west, and the three tribes of the camp of Dan on the north. The total number of men 20 years old and above who were able to go out to war among the twelve tribes was 603,550.

Between the camps of Israel and the tabernacle, the tribe of Levi was stationed. The family of Gershon camped on the west side, caring for all the soft furnishings of the tabernacle, such as the coverings and curtains. The family of Kohath camped on the south side, caring for the most holy furnishings within the tabernacle, including the ark, the table of showbread, the golden lampstand, the golden altar of incense, and the bronze altar. The family of Merari camped on the north side, caring for all the structural components, such as the boards, pillars, and sockets.

On the east side of the tabernacle, facing the sunrise and the entrance of the tabernacle, Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons camped. They were responsible for maintaining the holiness of the sanctuary. The total number of Levite males one month old and above was 22,000. The Levites had originally been set apart to serve God in place of every firstborn male in Israel. However, after the census was taken, there were 273 more firstborn males among the Israelites than there were Levites. Therefore, God commanded that each of these should pay five shekels as redemption money to the high priest. God also gave detailed instructions regarding how the Levites were to dismantle and transport every article of the tabernacle whenever the camp set out on its journey.

I have deliberately repeated God's instructions to Moses in chapters 1–4 because I want to emphasize one important truth: God is a God of order, and His order is entirely according to heavenly logic. To preserve God's testimony and to safeguard His holiness, righteousness, and glory from being violated, God gave exceedingly detailed instructions concerning every aspect. Furthermore, the way God instructed His people perfectly reflected His own divine logic—from the greater to the smaller, from the outside to the inside, from the whole to each individual part, and from the outward material aspects to the inward spiritual reality.

Generally speaking, people can be divided into two broad categories. One group focuses on the big picture without paying much attention to details. The other begins with details and often fails to see the whole picture. God, however, begins with the overall plan and then, according to a precise and orderly logic, develops everything step by step in accordance with its structure until it is ultimately applied to every individual person. Beginning with the arrangement of the outer camps and then moving inward to the encampment and responsibilities of the Levites, God first dealt with matters that were more outward, more material, and more visible.

By chapter 5, God began to deal with the inward condition of His people. Yet His method remained the same—from the greater to the smaller, from the outside to the inside. In Numbers 5:1–4, He first dealt with conditions that would affect the holiness of the entire congregation. In Numbers 5:5–10, He addressed offenses committed in human relationships and the matter of making restitution. In Numbers 5:11–31, He dealt with the most intimate human relationship—the issue of marital faithfulness between husband and wife.

At that time, the instructions in this chapter were to be carried out according to their literal meaning, because God was dwelling among the Israelites and could not tolerate uncleanness, sin, or suspicion in their midst. Today, however, their application in the church should be understood according to their spiritual significance.

Verses 1–4: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell.' And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did."

First, the Lord commanded Moses that anyone among the Israelites whose condition would affect the holiness of the entire congregation must be separated from the camp. Whether male or female, such individuals were to be put outside the camp so that they would not defile it. The camp was the very place where God dwelt. God made it very clear to Moses: when He came to dwell among His people, no uncleanness could be tolerated where He lived. His dwelling place had to be completely holy.

The same principle applies to the church today. The church is God's household; therefore, uncleanness cannot be tolerated within it. Just as the Lord commanded, so the Israelites obeyed. In this passage, three specific conditions are mentioned that would affect the holiness of the whole congregation. Anyone with one of these conditions had to be put outside the camp. The first condition was leprosy; The second was a bodily discharge; The third was defilement through contact with a dead body. Let us consider these one by one.

First, The Person with Leprosy. In Leviticus 13 and 14, God devoted considerable space to instructing Moses how to examine and diagnose leprosy, how to determine when a leper had become clean, and what procedures were necessary before that person could be restored to the camp of Israel. Because leprosy was a contagious skin disease, the infected individual had to remain outside the camp until he was declared clean.

At that time, God instructed Moses how to deal with leprosy, but He did not require Moses to implement these regulations immediately. It was not until the Book of Numbers, when God began to lead Israel into action and organized the nation into

military camps, assigning every person his proper place, that He commanded Moses to identify those with leprosy and put them outside the camp. In this way, they would be separated from the Israelites, preventing the disease from spreading and defiling the entire camp.

Moses obeyed God's command and instructed the Israelites accordingly, and they, in turn, removed all those with leprosy from the camp. Before the camp had been organized, there was no distinction between being inside or outside the camp. But once the camp was established, its holiness had to be preserved.

Today, we should understand this according to its spiritual meaning. Leprosy represents the manifestation of sin after a person has sinned. The root of leprosy is rebellion against God's authority. Later, in Numbers 12, we will read that Moses' sister, Miriam, was struck with leprosy and was isolated outside the camp. This is the first recorded instance of someone being put outside the camp because of leprosy. According to the principle of Scripture, the first example often establishes the spiritual significance of a subject. Miriam became leprous because she refused to submit to the representative authority God had established—namely, Moses.

The same principle applies in the church today. We all understand that Christ is the Head of the church. Therefore, Christ is the authority over every believer, and everyone ought to submit to Him. Whoever refuses to submit to Christ and rebels against His authority is, spiritually speaking, like one afflicted with leprosy and should be separated. Yet within the church, who can determine whether someone has truly rebelled against Christ? Therefore, the real test is not merely whether a person claims to submit to Christ, but whether he submits to the authority that Christ has established in the church.

Today, God has entrusted the church to its elders. To refuse to submit to the elders is to refuse to submit to the representative authority established by God. This is a very serious matter. Therefore, when appointing elders, the church must exercise great care. They must be appointed entirely according to the revelation of Scripture—not according to human preference, nor by majority vote. Rather, the Holy Spirit must first make His choice evident, and then the saints in the church

should confirm it. Only such elders possess genuine spiritual authority within the church. Once elders have been properly appointed, they become God's representative authority in the church. Those who refuse to submit to or who rebel against this representative authority should be separated from the fellowship of the church until the matter of rebellion has been properly dealt with. Only then may they be received back into the fellowship of the church.

Secondly, the Person with a Bodily Discharge. The second condition requiring separation was that of a bodily discharge. In Leviticus 15, God first revealed to Moses what constituted a bodily discharge. For the details concerning this subject, the saints may review the daily Bible reading on Leviticus 15. In Leviticus 15:16–30, Scripture describes the normal bodily emissions of both men and women, together with the regulations for ceremonial cleansing during those times. A bodily discharge, however, refers to an abnormal discharge occurring outside the normal physiological process.

Although such a discharge was not itself contagious, anyone who came into contact with the afflicted person, as well as anything he or she touched—clothing, bedding, and other objects—became ceremonially unclean. Therefore, those with such a discharge also had to remain outside the camp until they recovered, after which they could be received back into the camp.

Spiritually speaking, a bodily discharge signifies the leaking away of life. Luke 8:43–48 records how the Lord Jesus healed a woman who had suffered from a flow of blood for twelve years, indicating that for twelve years her life had been continually draining away. Jesus not only healed her but also openly declared before the crowd that she had been made well, so that she might once again be accepted into Jewish society.

From another perspective, a bodily discharge also causes others to become unclean. When our words, temper, or behavior are left unchecked, and we indulge ourselves in an excessive and abnormal manner, we negatively affect those around us and render them spiritually unclean. For example, a person whose tongue is uncontrolled, who delights in gossip and stirring up strife, defiles those who listen.

Likewise, someone whose temper is out of control, whose words and actions are governed by anger, wounds the people around him. Such a person should be separated for a time until he himself has been cleansed, after which he may once again be received into the fellowship of the church.

Third, the person defiled by contact with a dead body. The third condition requiring separation was defilement through contact with a dead body. Once a person became unclean, anyone who came into contact with him would likewise become unclean. Why was a dead body considered unclean? Because the wages of sin is death. Death is the ultimate outcome of man's sin, and it is also the outward manifestation of sin.

In Numbers 19:11–12, it says: "He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean." Here we are told that anyone who touched a dead body would be unclean for seven days and must purify himself with the water of purification on the third day.

Spiritually speaking, contact with death signifies contact with spiritual death, which causes a person to become spiritually unclean. Today, each of us has some awareness of sin. After we sin, our conscience convicts us and urges us to confess and repent so that we may once again be cleansed. Yet we are often far less sensitive to spiritual death. Perhaps this is because contact with spiritual death dulls our spiritual senses, making it difficult for us to discern our true condition. As a result, we may remain in a state of spiritual death for an extended period without realizing it.

I believe that many believers who, after receiving God's salvation, have at one time drifted away from the church for a season have experienced this very thing. At first, there is still an inward prompting. Occasionally they may return to visit the church. But gradually, as time passes, this condition becomes habitual, and eventually they no longer desire to enter the church at all. In reality, this is the spread of spiritual death within a person, until all spiritual sensitivity has been lost.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must recognize that spiritual death is even more dreadful than sin itself. When we sin, our conscience urges us to repent. But spiritual death causes us to lose our spiritual sensitivity, leaving us in that condition for a prolonged period. This is truly a tragic loss. May God open our eyes so that we will avoid every form of spiritual death and continually maintain a keen spiritual sensitivity. Only then can we continue to grow in the divine life.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You. Through today's passage, You instructed Moses to preserve the purity of the congregation of Israel. This reminds us that in the church today we must submit to spiritual authority, exercise self-control over our natural emotions, feelings, and speech, and avoid contact with spiritual death, lest uncleanness spread throughout the church. Bless the church to which I belong, and bless our church life, that it may truly be Your holy dwelling place. Help every saint who comes into the church to grow in a healthy and safe spiritual environment until each one matures into the testimony of Christ. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.