

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

Numbers 5: 11-15

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We are continuing to read Numbers Chapter 5 and today we will read verses 11 to 15.

In order to preserve the holiness and unity of the congregation of Israel, the Lord instructed Moses first to remove those factors that would defile the holiness of the community. Those with leprosy, those with a bodily discharge, and those who had become ceremonially unclean by touching a dead body were to be sent outside the camp.

Then, God commanded that the sin of defrauding or wronging another person be dealt with. To wrong another person was to sin against the LORD. The offender was required to confess the sin, make full restitution, and add one-fifth of the value as compensation.

Finally, God addressed the situation in which trust had been lost between husband and wife. The family is the basic unit of society; without healthy families, there can be no stable society. The mutual trust between husband and wife is the most important foundation and indicator of a healthy family. The most serious threat to that trust is the involvement of a third party in the marriage.

Therefore, Numbers 5:11–31, a passage of twenty-one verses, is devoted to explaining in detail how to deal with a situation in which a husband suspects that his wife has been unfaithful—how the matter is to be handled, how it is to be determined, and how restoration is to take place.

This passage is one of the most unique sections in the entire Bible. It provides a remarkably detailed description of an extraordinary procedure for dealing with a husband's suspicion that his wife has committed adultery or become unfaithful. For readers in the twenty-first century, this passage is not easy to understand. There

are two main reasons for this difficulty. The first concerns the point of view from which the issue is approached, which is closely related to the social conditions of that time. The second concerns the method by which the case was judged.

Let us first consider the first issue. Most readers, upon reading this passage, immediately feel that it is unfair and reflects male favoritism. Since either the husband or the wife could be unfaithful in a marriage, why does the passage speak only of a husband suspecting his wife of adultery, and not of a wife suspecting her husband?

Most Bible commentators approach this passage from the perspective that society at that time was patriarchal, emphasizing that this was the established social order of that era. This passage served to provide protection for vulnerable women, so that a wife would not become grounds for divorce merely because of her husband's suspicion. Indeed, in that historical context, it protected many wives whose husbands were overly suspicious and helped preserve the stability of the family.

However, I believe there is an even more important reason for interpreting this passage, namely, from the perspective of typology. The Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament, and the most complete explanation of the typological significance of the husband-and-wife relationship is given by Paul in Ephesians 5:22–25, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”

The relationship between husband and wife is, in fact, a type of the relationship between Christ and the church. The wife is to submit to her husband just as the church submits to Christ, while the husband is to love his wife just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. A husband who is willing to lay down his life for his wife will surely have a wife who willingly submits to him. Therefore, husbands should not ask why their wives do not submit. Rather, they should ask themselves whether they have failed to love their wives sufficiently and have not yet laid down

their lives for them. Christ first gave Himself for the church, and then the church came into being. Likewise, a husband must first lay down his life for his wife, and he will naturally gain a wife who willingly submits to him. Therefore, in applying these principles to the marital relationship, God's standard for husbands is even higher than His standard for wives.

This passage also reminds the church, as the Bride, how she should preserve her purity toward Christ and not be enticed by the world, thereby provoking Christ's jealousy. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." The word "jealous" in this verse is, according to the original Greek, precisely the idea of jealousy. Paul possessed a holy jealousy, fearing that the church might lose her purity and devotion to Christ.

Secondly, the method described in Numbers 5:11–31 for testing chastity is truly remarkable. It is almost as though God gave His people a heavenly lie detector. Modern lie detector tests are based on scientific principles. When a person lies and experiences stress, changes occur in the person's heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, and perspiration. Sensitive instruments are able to detect these subtle physiological changes to determine whether the person is lying. This heavenly lie detector, however, does not depend on science. It operates only through God's direct intervention. How, then, should we make use of this heavenly lie detector today? Over the next three days, we will carefully study this passage. Today, we will focus only on Numbers 5:11–15.

Verse 11-13: “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘If any man’s wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him, and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and there was no witness against her, nor was she caught.”

At that time, the two million Israelites lived together in the wilderness, and harmony within the family was of vital importance. If trust between husband and

wife was broken, it would affect the stability of the entire Israelite community. The most serious threat to the trust between husband and wife was suspicion concerning each other's marital faithfulness.

The passage first addresses the situation in which a wife has committed adultery and sinned against her husband. This was an extremely serious matter. According to the Law at that time, Leviticus 20:10 states, "The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death." Adultery was a capital offense. Because its consequences were so serious, a person could not be convicted merely on the basis of suspicion or a one-sided accusation. A conviction required either that the offenders be caught in the very act of adultery, leaving neither the adulterer nor the adulteress any room to deny the offense, in which case both were to be put to death; or, at the very least, the testimony of two witnesses confirming their adulterous relationship before a conviction could be made.

If the wife had acted with great secrecy, so that her defilement was not discovered in the act and there were no witnesses, the husband might still harbor suspicions but have no direct evidence. If this matter were left unresolved, the husband's suspicion alone would already have destroyed the trust between husband and wife. Such a family would never enjoy peace. Therefore, the matter had to be dealt with immediately.

Verse 14: "if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself."

When we look at this passage, we see that the Scripture is very fair and takes both sides into consideration. A husband's suspicion alone cannot constitute sufficient evidence for condemnation. However, it is very clear that the husband had developed a spirit of jealousy. The translation "a spirit of jealousy" is actually closer to the original meaning than the Chinese translation "a heart of suspicion and resentment." The phrase the spirit of jealousy can be directly translated as "the

spirit of jealousy." The Chinese translation conveys the idea of a heart of resentment that arises because of suspicion. This translation is somewhat overly negative, because jealousy is not the same as suspicion and resentment.

In the Bible, jealousy is not always a negative term. For example, James 4:5 says, "Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'?" This tells us that the Holy Spirit who dwells within us loves us to such an extent that He even loves us with jealousy. This kind of holy jealousy reveals God's exclusive and intense love for His people. Its purpose is to protect us from falling into the temptations and enticements of the world. Or, going even further, it is intended to restore us if we have already fallen into the world's traps.

The positive use of jealousy in Scripture is most often connected with God. Because God is infinite, His love is eternal, unconditional, and selfless, seeking nothing in return. Based upon such love, jealousy becomes something positive.

However, the passage in Numbers speaks of the husband having a spirit of jealousy, and this jealousy can potentially be negative. This is because his wife may truly have been defiled, or she may not have been defiled at all—it may simply have been the result of the husband's suspicion. Nevertheless, when the spirit of jealousy begins to operate within the husband while the truth of the matter is still unclear, in modern society the husband might immediately begin investigating and gathering evidence. Regardless of the final outcome, the process itself would damage the atmosphere of harmony that should exist within the family. Usually, such an investigation takes a considerable amount of time, causing the family to remain in a state of uncertainty and unrest for an extended period.

God's way of dealing with this matter is immediate and direct. God knows that the trust between husband and wife must be restored as quickly as possible so that family life can return to harmony. This matter cannot be delayed. Therefore, God commanded that it be dealt with immediately.

Verse 15: “then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance.”

The Chinese Union Version translates this phrase as "suspicion and resentment", but the English translation is still "jealousy." In the discussion below, I will directly use the word "jealousy." This verse tells us that the way to deal with this matter is not through gathering evidence, nor through arguments and defensive exchanges between husband and wife. These human methods are mixed with personal interests and cannot escape the entanglement of natural human emotions; therefore, it is very difficult to achieve true fairness and justice. Chinese people often say, "Even an upright official finds it difficult to judge family matters," and in reality, truly impartial judges are even harder to find in this world.

God commanded Moses to bring this family matter to a higher level—that is, to bring the wife before the priest. The priest was the mediator between God and people. In other words, through the priest's help, this matter was entrusted to God for His judgment. Once the result was revealed, both parties had to accept it, because it was God's judgment. If this matter was not dealt with promptly and the spirit of jealousy was allowed to grow, the family would lose its peace, and everyone in the household, both young and old, would suffer as a result. Therefore, God required the priest to intervene, with the purpose of immediately bringing about a conclusion that everyone must accept.

The man was also required to bring the offering of jealousy. The English translation is "the offering of jealousy." A direct translation would be "the jealousy offering." Because it did not involve an animal sacrifice, the Chinese translation renders it as "grain offering"; however, this phrase does not actually appear in the original language. The original meaning is simply "the offering of jealousy."

According to Leviticus 2:1, the grain offering was to be made of fine flour mixed with oil and frankincense: "When anyone offers a grain offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on

it." the grain offering represents the fine and pure humanity of Christ. However, the jealousy offering reflects human imperfection. Therefore, it was to use one-tenth of an ephah of barley flour. Barley was coarse and much cheaper than wheat. In the land of Israel, barley was the first crop to ripen each year. During the Feast of Firstfruits, a sheaf of barley was waved before the LORD as a wave offering.

Why was one-tenth of an ephah of barley flour used? Most commentators believe that because barley was coarse, it appropriately represented that this was a jealousy offering, not a grain offering representing the humanity of Christ. This interpretation, however, is based only on the outward characteristics of the crop. I prefer to seek the answer from within Scripture itself.

I would like to offer another interpretation. The most touching love story in the Bible is that of the wealthy man Boaz marrying the Moabite woman Ruth. In Ruth chapter 2, Ruth had just returned to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi. At that time, it was the season of the first barley harvest. Ruth went to Boaz's field to glean the leftover grain. When Boaz first saw Ruth, he appreciated her and showed kindness toward her. He not only commanded his servants not to shame her, but he also instructed them to pull out some grain from the bundles and leave it for Ruth to gather. As a result, Ruth 2:17 says: "So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley."

Barley was the firstfruits crop. Offering barley was meant to cause the husband to remember how he was first attracted to his wife and how he was willing to show kindness toward her. But now only one-tenth of an ephah was offered. Perhaps this was asking the husband: Why has the love you had at the beginning now become only one-tenth of what it once was? This is a beautiful reminder not to allow jealousy to blind the heart. Because this was the "offering of jealousy," no oil and no frankincense were added. Oil represents the Holy Spirit, and frankincense represents the fragrance of resurrection. The ordinary grain offering was to include oil and frankincense. When it was placed upon the altar, its fragrant aroma would rise before God and satisfy Him. But this "offering of jealousy" was not pleasing to God; therefore, oil and frankincense could not be added.

For the husband, it was the "offering of jealousy," reminding him to remember his first love. For the wife, it was the "offering of memorial" (offering of memorial), intended to cause her to remember her iniquity—that is, to reveal whether she was truly guilty in the matter of which her husband suspected her. The husband brought his wife before the priest and offered the jealousy offering in order to bring the matter before God and ask God to make the judgment. Regardless of the outcome, both parties had to fully accept it and could no longer hold any resentment or suspicion toward one another.

Dear brothers and sisters, consider your relationship with your spouse or with other family members. Has trust between you been lost? If people live under the same roof but cannot be united in heart and cannot trust one another, that family will not have peace or joy. Therefore, the matter must be dealt with immediately.

If we expand this further to our spiritual family—the church—do you have resentment or barriers in your heart toward a brother or sister in Christ because of a lack of trust? This also needs to be dealt with immediately, so that you do not lose the peace you should have within the church. And the way to deal with these matters is to bring them before God.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for reminding us that You value the relationship of mutual trust between husbands and wives, and You also value the relationship of mutual trust among brothers and sisters in the church. Help me carefully examine myself before You: Are there relationships of trust that have been damaged but have not been dealt with in a timely manner? Give me wisdom, give me grace, and give me courage to bring these matters before You, allowing You to handle them and make the judgment. Give me a submissive spirit, willing to seek peace with others both at home and in the church. Bless my daily life. I pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!