

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

Numbers 8: 20-26

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 8. Today we will read from verse 20 to verse 26.

The Levites were set apart to serve God. They had to stand in the light, seeing clearly how they were to minister. They also had to be fashioned like the golden lampstand—hammered and shaped—to become God's shining testimony. During the ceremony for the ordination of the Levites, the Israelites were to lay their hands on the heads of the Levites, designating them as a wave offering presented to God, to serve in place of the people of Israel. The Levites, in turn, were to lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls offered as the sin offering and the burnt offering, so that atonement might be made for them.

Afterward, the Levites themselves were presented as a wave offering before the LORD and were entrusted to the priests to carry out the service of the Tabernacle. Throughout the entire ordination process, God gave Moses detailed instructions. Numbers 8:20–22 tells us that Moses faithfully carried out everything God had commanded him, thus fulfilling the commission that God had entrusted to him.

Verse 20: “Thus Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel did to the Levites; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the children of Israel did to them.”

Moses was God's faithful servant. In accordance with God's instructions, Moses directed Aaron and the whole congregation of Israel to carry out the laying on of hands for the Levites. Just as the LORD had commanded them, so they faithfully carried it out.

Verse 21: “And the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them like a wave offering before the Lord, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them.”

The Levites first purified themselves. They had the water of purification sprinkled upon them, shaved all the hair from their bodies, and washed their clothes, thereby making themselves ceremonially clean. Then Aaron, according to the LORD's command given through Moses, presented the Levites as a wave offering before the LORD. On the one hand, they were set apart to serve God in place of the Israelites; on the other hand, they were given to the priests to carry out the service of the Tabernacle. Aaron also offered the sin offering on behalf of the Levites to make atonement for them, so that they might be cleansed. He then presented the burnt offering and the grain offering, so that they would be accepted by God.

Verse 22: “After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.”

After completing the ceremony of the laying on of hands, the Levites were permitted to enter the Tabernacle to carry out its service under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. Everything was done exactly as the LORD had commanded Moses. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that the Israelites did to the Levites just as the LORD had commanded Moses. We see that every instruction originated from the LORD. Moses faithfully communicated God's commands, and the Israelites obediently carried them out according to all that Moses had instructed.

The same principle applies to the church today. Christ is the Head of the church, and God raises up believers to serve in various ministries. These servants come to understand God's leading for the church and faithfully proclaim His Word to the saints. The believers, having heard God's Word, put it into practice. In this way, Christ's purpose for His church is accomplished. This is what Paul describes in Ephesians 4:15–16: "...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit

together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." Christ is the Head of the church. Through every joint that supplies what is needed, each member of the body fulfills its proper function, and together the whole Body of Christ is built up. This is truly a beautiful picture of God's design for His church.

Verse 23-24: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting."

Serving in the Tabernacle required a certain measure of spiritual maturity. The Levites had to follow the priests' instructions exactly and handle the furnishings and sacred vessels of the Tabernacle with great care and reverence. Otherwise, they would put their very lives in danger. Therefore, the Levites were to begin their service at twenty-five years of age, coming to assist in the work of the Tabernacle. We also remember Numbers 4:3, "From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting." Does this mean the required age was twenty-five or thirty?

In fact, there is no contradiction between these two passages. A Levite did not officially begin his full ministry until he reached thirty years of age. However, beginning at twenty-five, he was to come to the Tabernacle as an apprentice. Under the supervision of experienced Levites, he would learn the work of the ministry for five years.

In Scripture, the number five often signifies responsibility. At the age of twenty-five—that is, five times five—the Levite had reached the stage where he could begin to take responsibility for himself. At that point, he came to the Tabernacle to begin his training. Within the tribe of Levi were three major clans, and each clan had its own assigned responsibilities. A Levite was to serve according to the duties of his own clan, learning under the guidance of mature and experienced Levites for five years. When he had gained sufficient experience and reached the age of thirty,

he was qualified to assume his responsibilities independently and officially enter into his ministry. Precisely because the service of the Levites was so solemn and sacred, they were required to undergo five years of training before they could serve independently at the age of thirty.

Verse 25: “and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more.”

The service of the Levites consisted largely of physically demanding labor. Therefore, at the age of fifty, they were to retire from active service and no longer perform the work of the Tabernacle. From the age of twenty-five, when they began their apprenticeship, until their retirement at fifty, the Levites served for a total of twenty-five years in the ministry of the Tabernacle. The number twenty-five is five times five. The first twenty-five years—from birth until the age of twenty-five—represent the time in which a person grows to the point of being able to take responsibility for himself. The second period of twenty-five years, serving in the Tabernacle, represents being able to take responsibility for the work of God's ministry. Thus, when the service of the Levites is considered, the number five appears repeatedly, and five is the biblical number associated with responsibility.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope we all recognize that, in serving the church, the quality God values most is being responsible. A person who is unable to take responsibility for himself is not yet ready to participate in ministry, because his spiritual life has not yet matured. This is why a Levite had to reach the age of twenty-five before beginning his service. In other words, he first had to become responsible for himself before he could begin serving. Once he entered the ministry, he was expected to take responsibility for the work entrusted to him. This is represented by the second period of twenty-five years.

Then, when his physical strength declined to the point that he could no longer carry out those responsibilities, he was to step down from the work that had been entrusted to him. May each one of us become a person who can faithfully bear responsibility, so that we may be entrusted with God's work. One day, when we

stand before the judgment seat of Christ, the first commendation we long to hear from Him is that we have been faithful. Faithfulness is the most fundamental requirement of Christian service.

Verse 26: “They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they themselves shall do no work. Thus, you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties.”

After reaching the age of fifty, the Levites were to retire from their physical labor. This did not mean they were to return home and cease serving altogether. Rather, they were to relinquish the physically demanding responsibilities to the younger, stronger Levites. This was the proper way to pass on the work from one generation to the next. However, the Levites who were fifty years old and above were still to remain in the Tabernacle, serving alongside their brothers. They were to assist them and keep the charge, but they were not to perform the physical work themselves.

In other words, after the age of fifty, their ministry was to transition from a ministry of labor to a ministry of life. Through teaching, encouraging, comforting, and praying, they were to stand alongside their fellow Levites and help them faithfully keep God's commands. To keep the charge means to understand God's will and to help those around them obey His commands. This is the essence of a ministry of life.

The LORD instructed that this was how the Levites were to be treated. Once they reached the age of fifty, they were no longer to bear the burden of physical labor. This was an expression of God's special mercy. They were to move beyond practical duties and devote themselves to the ministry of life. Dear brothers and sisters, do you see the beauty of this picture? In the church, true service is retirement from labor, but not retirement from ministry. When our physical strength declines and we are no longer able to carry out demanding tasks, we should transition into a ministry of life. We no longer need to personally perform every practical duty. Instead, through the rich supply of spiritual life, we help younger believers learn

how to serve. We support those who are actively serving, pray for them, and when they encounter difficulties, we offer mature counsel and biblical wisdom.

To be able to let go of our responsibilities and entrust them to others is a blessing. It demonstrates that throughout our years of service we have intentionally trained fellow workers who are able to carry on the work and faithfully inherit God's commission. This is the kind of service that pleases God.

We must recognize that God values the ministry of life more highly than the ministry of tasks. People often have a fallen mindset. They are reluctant to hand over responsibilities because they assume that controlling the work means controlling authority. Such thinking reveals a failure to recognize God's sovereignty. God is the Lord of the work. The true authority belongs to Him alone. We are simply His servants, entrusted with completing the assignments He gives us for a season.

If we truly serve faithfully, our lives will mature, and our ministry will naturally progress from serving through outward work to serving through the impartation of life. At that stage, our greatest concern is no longer merely accomplishing the work, but manifesting God's testimony through the way we live. In reality, God's central purpose is not measured by how much work we accomplish for Him, but by whether our lives become a testimony that reflects Him.

As the Lord said in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The apostles indeed traveled extensively, preaching the gospel and establishing churches in many cities. Yet Christ's final commission was not merely to accomplish a great work, but that the church itself would become His witness. Only a ministry that imparts life can produce such a testimony.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we all establish a legacy in our service. We should not simply do the work ourselves—we should bring others alongside us. If you love studying the Scriptures, lead a group of believers to study the Bible together. If you have a burden for worship and praise, teach others to worship and sing hymns together. If you have a burden for the ministry of the Word, train believers to

preach and teach from the pulpit. If you enjoy serving through preparing fellowship meals, bring others with you into the kitchen so that every believer may joyfully learn to prepare food in service to the church. In short, our ministry must never end with ourselves. There should always be someone prepared to continue the work. We must learn to move from the front of the stage to behind the scenes. This is not merely the passing on of a ministry—it is the passing on of life.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, Through the book of Numbers, You have revealed Your mercy to us. When the Levites reached the age of fifty, they were to retire from physical labor, yet they continued serving alongside their brothers in the Tabernacle, faithfully keeping Your charge. You value our service, but even more, You value the growth and maturity of our lives through that service. What matters most to You is not how much work we accomplish, but whether our daily lives display Your testimony. Help us to regard every opportunity to serve as an opportunity for our lives to be refined and for the spiritual gifts You have given us to be developed. Bless the church to which I belong. May it not only abound in ministries and activities, but also be filled with mature believers whose lives bear witness to Christ and who are able to lead the church along the pathway of spiritual life. Bless my church; I pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!