

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

Numbers 9: 15 - 23

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 9. Today we read from verse 15 to verse 23.

Beginning from Numbers 9:15, Moses, leading a congregation of more than two million Israelites, was about to enter the wilderness and journey toward the good land of Canaan that God had promised. When they first left Egypt, they were a disorderly crowd. On the day after the first Passover, they hurriedly left Egypt, bringing their herds of cattle, their flocks of sheep, and the articles of gold, silver, and clothing they had asked from the Egyptians.

Exodus 13:21-22 records it this way: "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people."

Although Moses was a very capable leader, facing a disorderly crowd, mixed in with many a mixed multitude, Moses too found it hard to lead this disorderly crowd. Therefore, God led them in a supernatural way. By day there was the pillar of cloud, by night the pillar of fire. The whole congregation of Israel could clearly see God's guidance. The congregation of Israel walked almost without stopping, day and night, for three months. Starting from Rameses, passing through twelve stations, they finally arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai. There they stayed beside Mount Sinai for eight and a half months. During this period, Moses went up Mount Sinai, received the law and the blueprint for building the tabernacle, and then, leading the congregation of Israel, according to God's instructions on the mountain, completed the building of the tabernacle.

On the first day of the first month in the second year after the exodus, Moses set up the tabernacle, and the glory of God filled the tabernacle, and He called to Moses out of the tabernacle and spoke to him. From this day on, Moses was very busy, and the Israelites were also very busy. Moses wrote down the commandments, statutes, and ordinances that God revealed, which became the book of Leviticus that we hold in our hands today. Moses also taught the people of Israel to keep them. Because the holy, righteous, and glorious God dwelt in the Most Holy Place within the tabernacle, the daily life and conduct of the Israelites all centered on the tabernacle. Moses then, according to God's command, established the ministry system of the priests and the Levites. The priests became the mediators between God and the Israelites, maintaining the holiness of the Israelites, and leading the Israelites to worship God and offer sacrifices.

The Levites were set apart to carry out the work of the tabernacle on behalf of the Israelites, lest the Israelites, through ignorance and rashness, offend God. At this time, the Israelites willingly and gladly offered rich offerings for this dedication of the altar, for twelve days in a row. By the first day of the second month of the second year, Moses, according to God's command, numbered the men of the twelve tribes who were able to go out to war, and organized the Israelites into an army. The Israelites were no longer a disorderly crowd, but the army of God.

Within, there were the priests and the Levites serving God, maintaining the relationship between man and God, so that man might conform to God's holy nature, and also maintaining the relationship between man and man, so that man might conform to God's righteous nature. In this way, the peace of God was with the Israelites, and preserved the unity of the Israelites. Without, there were the choice warriors of the twelve tribes surrounding the tabernacle, guarding the testimony of God. In this way, the Israelites were prepared, ready to enter the great and terrible wilderness. When were they to set out? Where were they to encamp? From chapter 9 verse 15 to verse 23, God's guidance is revealed in principle. From chapter 10 verse 1 to verse 10, the unified movement of the Israelites is very practically brought out by the sound of the trumpets. From chapter 10 verse 11

onward, it clearly describes how, on the twentieth day of the second month in the second year after the exodus, the Israelites officially set out.

Why did they have to wait until the twentieth day of the second month? Because there were Israelites who had touched a dead body and could not keep the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month, and they could keep the Passover a month later, on the fourteenth of the second month. In Numbers 9:12, it specifically points out there that the make-up Passover was still to be kept according to all the ordinances of the Passover. After the Passover there was the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days in a row. God's timing was reckoned very precisely: as soon as the seven days were fulfilled, He led the Israelites to set out. Today we will read chapter 9 verses 15 to 23, the principles of God's guidance of the Israelites.

Verse 15: "Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning, it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire."

When the Israelites set out from Rameses, God's pillar of cloud and pillar of fire led the Israelites all the way, until they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. God called Moses up Mount Sinai; on the mountain there was thunder, lightning, and a thick cloud, and God descended upon the mountain in fire, and the whole mountain smoked like a furnace. At that time, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire stayed upon Mount Sinai, staying for eight and a half months, until the first day of the first month of the second year, when the building of the tabernacle was completed, and God's presence moved from Mount Sinai to the tabernacle.

So this verse says that on the day Moses "raised up the tabernacle, the cloud covered the tabernacle." This tabernacle was the tent of the Testimony. The ark was the ark of the Testimony, and God met with man upon the mercy seat of the ark, and the cloud manifested God's presence. In those days, when the Israelites looked up and saw the cloud, they knew that God was in their midst, so that they

dared not be careless, but had to maintain the harmony and unity among God's people, lest they offend God.

In the New Testament, the tabernacle is a type of the church. Then what is the cloud of God's presence? Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

It turns out that the witnesses of faith listed in Hebrews chapter 11, they surround us like a cloud; they are our guides, and the examples of their growth in life become our signposts, leading us forward, yet without creating pressure. The brothers and sisters who run the heavenly journey together with us are also the cloud of God's presence today.

Jesus also said in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Brothers and sisters loving one another is the sign that God is with us. The cloud proved God's presence. From evening until morning, the cloud was above it like the appearance of fire. During the day the cloud was easy to recognize; when night came, the cloud gave out light, in the appearance of fire, so that people could see it from afar.

The text especially tells us that from evening until morning, the cloud continually gave out the light of fire. In the wilderness night, dark as ink, the preciousness of God's presence is shown all the more. The light of fire tore through the night, pointing out to the night traveler the way home. Today the church, in a crooked and perverse age, must also shine like a light, drawing people out of darkness and toward the light.

Verse 16: "So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night."

By day the cloud covered the tabernacle, and by night the cloud, in the appearance of fire, lit up the darkness—so it was always. When the Israelites encamped, God was always with them, and it was a presence that people could see. The cloud by day, the fire by night, proclaimed God's presence. "So it was always" tells us that God's presence would not change. From the first day of the first month to the twentieth day of the second month, under Moses' leadership, the Israelites established the ministry system of the priests and the Levites, and organized the twelve tribes of Israel into an army, and so brought down God's presence.

For the church today, the Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:20 also tells us, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." When the church lifts up God's word, teaches God's word, and keeps God's word, the Lord promises to be with the church, even to the end of the age.

Verses 17-19: "Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle, they remained encamped. Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not journey."

These three verses let us see that the cloud not only proved God's presence, but the cloud also guided the movement of the Israelites. When the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites knew it was time to move forward.

Of course, for a congregation of more than two million to move forward was not an easy thing. But Moses had already, according to God's instructions, arranged the

division of labor of the Levites, and how to dismantle the tabernacle and transport the tabernacle; he had also arranged the order in which the twelve tribes of Israel were to move forward. Therefore, when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites, according to Moses' division of labor, each one knowing his own responsibility, each shouldering what he ought to do, followed the cloud and moved forward. Though the number of people was great, yet it was full of order, proceeding in sequence, showing forth the glory of God's army. Wherever the cloud settled, there the Israelites encamped.

The Israelites set out according to God's command, and encamped according to God's command. The cloud was the manifestation of God's command. However long the cloud stayed above the tabernacle, that long they encamped. When the cloud stayed above the tabernacle for many days, then for many days they did not set out.

Here we see that God's presence and God's guidance were very clear and definite, and everyone could see them. Therefore, it was easy for the Israelites to follow God's leading to set out or to encamp. Moses, as the leader of the Israelites, his main responsibility was to help the Israelites obey the visible guidance of God. Then in the New Testament, how does God guide the church? And what is the cloud that guides the church today?

Earlier we already quoted Hebrews 12:1, which tells us that the witnesses of faith throughout the ages surround us like a cloud. The road that these witnesses of faith have walked has already formed a set of footprints. Just as Song of Solomon 1:8 says: "If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock." If we do not know, we simply follow in the footsteps of the flock.

To follow in the footsteps of the flock may perhaps be easier for the individual, but for the church, there must also be added the same mind and one accord of all the saints, and only then can the church move forward together. That is to say, the saints in the church must form a unified vision, knowing God's will and commission for the church. In this way, when the church moves forward, no one will be left behind. Therefore, every saint in the church must learn two lessons:

First, it is in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Every saint must obtain light and guidance from God's word. That is to say, in reaching a consensus on the church's vision, God's word must be the basis. This is the outward evidence of every saint's following of God.

Second, in 1 John 2:27, "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him."

After having the basis of God's word, every saint must also have the anointing of the anointing, so that he is assured in his spirit that this is the leading of the Holy Spirit, and is willing to follow with all his heart. Therefore, every church needs to spend time forming a unified vision for the church. In this way, the church can clearly and definitely follow the cloud and move forward.

Next, from verse 20 to verse 22, the Scripture repeatedly explains the same one thing, namely, that the Israelites, organized into an army, must truly, unconditionally, and without asking reasons accept the guidance of the cloud. And behind the visible cloud is precisely God's desire to guide the Israelites to the good land of Canaan that God had promised. The reason God did not weary of explaining it again and again is that it tells us this really was not an easy thing. If we look ahead first, in the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness after this, there was repeated delay, so that they went in circles for thirty-eight years. God foreknew the stubbornness and rebellion of the Israelites, and therefore reminded and warned them again and again, hoping that the Israelites would be able to remember God's word.

In fact, the church today is the same. On the level of truth, following God is very simple and clear. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." As long as the church walks upon this road of Christ, it can attain to the Father's eternal will. This is clear enough, definite enough, but the church still often takes crooked paths. Therefore, the following three verses are precisely a reminder to the church today.

Verses 20-22: "So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the LORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the LORD they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey."

Sometimes the cloud stayed above the tabernacle a few days, and then they had to encamp in that place for a few days. Perhaps that place was not what anyone would consider comfortable and pleasant, but because the cloud stayed, the Israelites had to stay. Not until the cloud was taken up could they move forward. Sometimes, arriving at a place, the cloud stayed only from evening until morning. That is to say, they arrived only the evening of the day before; the Levites had to immediately set up the tabernacle again, the priests placed the holy things, and the twelve tribes of Israel encamped in their assigned positions. As a result, they stayed only one night, and the next morning the cloud was taken up. So then, the priests had to wrap up the holy things, the Levites had to dismantle the tabernacle, and the twelve tribes of Israel had to break camp and set out in order. The movement of more than two million people depended entirely on the cloud; they could not complain that there was not enough time, that they were too tired, or that they could not walk any farther—they had to immediately keep up with the movement of the cloud.

Sometimes God was full of grace, staying in one place for several days and nights, letting everyone obtain sufficient rest; and when the cloud was taken up, everyone set out accordingly. Sometimes, arriving at a place, the cloud stayed above the tabernacle two days, and they stayed two days; the cloud stayed above the tabernacle a month, and they stayed a month; the cloud stayed above the tabernacle a year, and they had to stay a year. They waited until the cloud was taken up, and only then could they set out.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a lesson not easy to learn. We all like to ask, why must we stay for a year? Is this not a great waste of time? Faith is following without asking why. What God wants us to know, God will naturally show us; what God does not want us to know, we do not ask. And man's ignorance is precisely the insisting on knowing, and this insisting on knowing is exactly the manifestation of having no faith. We must be assured that God is the all-knowing God, and God is also the God who loves us; He leads us in love, and therefore His leading is surely the most suitable for us. Although many times we do not know, or even cannot feel it, yet as long as we are willing to obey, we will surely be blessed.

Verse 23: "At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses."

The Israelites encamped according to God's command, and set out according to God's command; they completely followed God's command, just as God commanded Moses. Here we see that the function of the leader is to help the congregation obey God's command. Today the saints who serve in the church are the same; their most important responsibility is to help the saints understand God's word and keep God's word. When the saints in the church are all able to keep God's word, that is the evidence of this church being blessed.

Let us pray together: O Lord, through the Scripture of Numbers, we see how, three thousand five hundred years ago, You used the pillar of cloud to lead the Israelites through the great and terrible wilderness, finally to arrive at the good land of Canaan that You had promised. O Lord, thank You, that today You likewise use the pillar of cloud to lead Your church, giving us seeing eyes, able to see Your pillar of cloud; giving us hearing ears, able to hear Your command. Thank You that there are many witnesses, surrounding us like a cloud, and the road that these witnesses have walked has already formed the footprints of a flock, helping each one of us to come to know that Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Not only do we have the basis of Your word on the outside, but within us there is also the

anointing of the Holy Spirit, helping us to see the vision You have given the church, and this vision is able, like a cloud, to lead us to walk in the footsteps of the flock. When Christ comes again, we will be able to enter into the kingdom. Bless the church where I am. Praying in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.