

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

Numbers 11:1-6

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 will read Numbers chapter 11. Today we will read verses 1-6.

On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, God led the Israelites away from the wilderness of Sinai. They traveled for three days and entered the wilderness of Paran, arriving at the first encampment after they had officially begun their journey. This encampment has two names. The first name is Taberah. In 11:3, Taberah means "burning." The righteous and holy God is like a consuming fire, burning away the base and low things within us and consuming the works of wood, hay, and straw that people produce outwardly.

For the Israelites in the wilderness, God was still full of tolerance and mercy. The burning of the fire was restrained; it was God's warning to the Israelites. However, there were mixed multitudes among the Israelites who did not accept God's warning. Instead, they stirred up the Israelites' lust and brought about God's severe judgment. This is the second name of this encampment, given in 11:34: Kibroth Hattaavah, meaning "the graves of the people who had the desire."

The history of the Israelites is indeed a warning for the church today. In order for the church to move forward, God established a system of worship and service. He also organized all the saints in the church as an army, establishing their places of encampment and the order in which they should journey. The entire congregation celebrated the first Passover in the wilderness, and even those saints who had been defiled observed the Passover one month later. It seemed that everything had been properly prepared before the church began its journey. Yet, at the very first encampment, a great disaster occurred: they provoked God's anger and brought His judgment upon themselves.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that we can all see that the church is the Body of Christ and should be holy and without blemish. Therefore, every saint who comes into the church should deeply examine himself, cleanse himself, and walk humbly and carefully, lest his own negligence bring loss to the church. May God have mercy on us, so that we truly may learn from the history of Israel how to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and live a church life that is according to God's heart.

Verse 1: "Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp."

Under the leading of the ark of the covenant, the Israelites came into the wilderness of Paran. When they reached their first encampment, the people complained. Actually, this was not the first time the Israelites had complained. In the first month after they left Egypt, Exodus 16:1–3 records that in the wilderness of Sin, because they had no food, they complained against Moses and Aaron, saying: "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

When people are hungry, they need food to sustain their lives. This is a normal need. On that occasion, God did not become angry because of their complaint. Instead, He told Moses that He would rain bread from heaven, but the Israelites had to gather the food according to the method God had appointed.

From that day onward, manna became the food of the two million Israelites in the wilderness. The word manna means, "What is this?" It was something the Israelites had never seen before. It was food that God graciously provided for them, completely a miracle—and a miracle that happened every day. Sadly, when a miracle becomes an ordinary part of daily life, people can lose their ability to appreciate it. They no longer respond with thanksgiving, but instead begin to despise the grace that is readily available to them.

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus declared in John 6:51, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” In John 6:63, He went on to declare, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” We see that the manna the Israelites received in the wilderness points to the word God speaks to us, which is to become the daily supply of our spiritual life. Do we also often neglect our daily manna, just as the Israelites did?

This verse does not explicitly tell us why the Israelites complained, but the following verses mention food. Therefore, their complaints were probably related to the necessities of daily life. Life in the wilderness was certainly inconvenient and difficult. In humanity’s fallen nature, when things do not go smoothly, people complain and speak words of discontent. Their complaints reached the ears of the LORD, and the LORD’s anger was aroused. He caused fire to begin burning among the people who complained, and it burned all the way to the outskirts of the camp.

Here we see that even in His anger, God was full of restraint. The fire burned only among the people who complained, and it did not cross the boundary of the camp. Today, extreme weather conditions occur everywhere. Every summer, we see large-scale wildfires. Once they begin, they often become uncontrollable. The flames spread rapidly and fiercely, and wherever the fire goes, nothing remains but scorched earth. In this verse, we see that although God was angry, He exercised great restraint. This was a warning God gave to the Israelites.

Verses 2–3: “Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched. So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.”

When the people saw the consuming fire, they immediately cried out to Moses. Moses prayed to God, and God answered his prayer, so the fire was quenched. Moses then named that place Taberah. Taberah means “burning,” because the fire of the LORD had burned among them. Moses had spent more than ten months preparing the congregation of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai before they finally

began their formal journey through the wilderness. Who would have imagined that at the very first encampment, the people would complain, provoke God's anger, and bring about the burning fire?

Dear brothers and sisters, we must never underestimate complaining and arguing. These things may seem inevitable among groups of people, but the church is the place where God dwells with people. God's holiness is like a consuming fire and does not permit itself to be defiled. When someone begins to complain or argue, the leaders of the church must deal with it quickly and ask God to intervene and put an end to these things that do not please Him. The church is a place where the saints come together to enjoy God's grace. When everyone comes with a thankful heart and offers worship and praise to God together, the church will naturally be filled with peace and joy.

Verses 4–5: “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.’”

Moses had just calmed the fire of God's anger and named that place Taberah. Then the mixed multitude among the Israelites once again developed a craving and stirred up the Israelites to cry aloud, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat?”

Who were these mixed multitudes? Exodus 12:37–38 records that after the Passover, the Israelites journeyed from Rameses, and “a mixed multitude went up with them.” They were not Israelites. But when they saw that the God of Israel was powerful, and that the Israelites took much of the wealth of the Egyptians with them when they left Egypt, they wanted to gain some benefit from it, so they left Egypt along with the Israelites. They had not been called by God; they had simply mixed themselves among the Israelites for the sake of their own interests. When they encountered hardship, they immediately turned around and began to complain and cause trouble. Although they were not numerous compared with the

Israelites, they were able to stir up the Israelites to make trouble and became an obstacle to the Israelites' following God.

There are often similar mixed multitudes in the church today. They hope to gain benefits from the church and come to church for their own interests. Sooner or later, they can become a source of trouble for the church. If the church remains pure before God and helps everyone who comes into the church recognize that he is a sinner who needs the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ in order to receive heavenly peace, and if, after being saved by grace, he offers himself as a living sacrifice and learns to serve together with the saints, then in such a pure and healthy environment, there is naturally no room for the mixed multitude to thrive. But if the church relies on worldly things and becomes filled with earthly pleasures and blessings, it will naturally attract mixed multitudes, and they will become an obstacle to the church's progress.

These mixed multitudes specialized in stirring up the people's cravings. The Israelites had just passed through the fire of Taberah, yet they did not accept God's warning. Instead, they followed the mixed multitude and began to cry out, "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic."

There was actually nothing incorrect about this statement. The Nile River in Egypt was full of fish, and every day people could simply go into the water and catch fish to eat. The Nile also flooded regularly, making the land along the river fertile. Therefore, crops were abundant: cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. These foods not only satisfied people's stomachs but also provided rich stimulation and enjoyment for their taste buds.

The Israelites joined in with the mixed multitude, elevating the pleasures of the world and stirring up the lusts of the flesh. Yet they did not mention how they had lived under Pharaoh's oppression and become slaves, working busily every day without freedom. They did not even mention that newborn Hebrew boys were to be thrown into the river and could not be allowed to live. It turns out that enjoying good things in the world often comes at the cost of life itself. Now, in the wilderness,

they remembered only the pleasant things they could enjoy and forgot that they had cried out to God in their suffering, and that God had sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. People are always so quick to forget God's grace.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must be watchful and recognize the true nature of this world. First John 2:16 clearly defines the things of the world, "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." If we love the things of the world, the love of the Father is not in us. We must maintain a pure heart before God and not allow the ruler of this world to blind our eyes.

Verse 6: "But now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"

The phrase "our whole being is dried up" is translated in the KJV as "our soul is dried away." This was truly an exaggerated statement. They longed for the food of Egypt. Their thoughts all day were filled with Egypt's rich and stimulating foods. The more they thought about them, the more they wanted them. They wished they could immediately return to Egypt to eat the fish of the Nile, together with the strongly flavored leeks, onions, and garlic.

Then they looked at what was before them: there was nothing except manna. They despised the food God had prepared for them and longed for the pleasures of Egypt. They forgot the suffering of slavery in Egypt. They also forgot the joy they experienced when they first gathered the manna and exclaimed, "What is this?" God's grace seemed to have become so cheap that it could not compare with Egypt's onions and garlic. Dear brothers and sisters, do we also often fall into this condition? May God have mercy on us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. The Israelites in the Old Testament are a type of the church today. As soon as they began their journey through the wilderness, they complained and provoked God's anger. Then they developed cravings and

longed for the good things they had enjoyed in the world. They went even further and despised the daily supply of manna.

Dear Lord, we confess that this is often a picture of us as well. After receiving Your grace and being saved, we still often cannot forget the good things of the world, and we consequently despise Your Word, so that we cannot enjoy the daily supply of Your Word. Lord, we deeply repent before You. Help us to remember Your grace, and give us a pure heart and a healthy spiritual appetite, so that through the daily supply of manna, You may transform us and adjust us. The words You speak to us are spirit and life. How greatly we need the growth of our spiritual life. Bless the time I spend reading the Bible each day, that I may receive my supply directly from You and experience growth in life. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.