

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

Numbers 11: 31-35

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 11. Today, we are reading verses 31 through 35.

Moses brought the two difficulties he was facing before the LORD. The LORD not only tolerated Moses' complaint, but also found a solution for Moses. Yesterday we read the solution to the first difficulty. Because Moses felt that the burden of bearing the responsibility of managing the people of Israel alone was truly too heavy, God took of the Spirit that was upon Moses and placed the same upon the seventy elders of Israel. They were then moved by the Spirit and began to prophesy, proving that they had received the same Spirit as Moses and could bear responsibility, managing the people of Israel together with Moses in one accord.

Among them, there were two elders who did not come to the place, yet they also received the Spirit and began to prophesy. Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, out of his good intention of loving Moses, asked Moses to forbid them. Yet Moses was very broad and declared that he wished every one of the people of Israel could be moved by the Spirit and prophesy. Perhaps Moses himself did not know that he was actually prophesying: one day, the New Testament saints would all be able to prophesy one by one.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:31-32, "For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." The word translated in the Chinese Union Version as "preach as prophets" is translated in English as "prophesy," that is, to speak prophecy as a prophet. Actually, the meaning of this word does not necessarily refer to predicting things that have not yet happened. A more accurate translation should be to speak for God and to speak forth God's will, so that all may understand God's word.

Today's passage continues to deal with the second difficulty Moses raised: the people of Israel wanted to eat meat. In verses 18-20 of chapter 11, God told Moses to tell the people that they first had to separate themselves completely unto God and prepare to eat meat. God would supply abundantly, so that they could eat meat for a whole month, until they loathed meat. Perhaps then they would repent and once again appreciate the daily manna God had given them. Moses was a faithful servant. Although the Bible does not explicitly record it, Moses surely faithfully conveyed the words God had commanded. Next, let us see how God supplied the people so that they could eat meat.

Verse 31: "Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground."

In the Middle East, quail are migratory birds, traveling back and forth between southern Europe and the Arabian Peninsula. The LORD God raised up a great wind and blew a large flock of quail from the sea, scattering them around the camp of the Israelites. This large flock of quail was so numerous that the Bible records: about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, about two cubits above the surface of the ground.

One cubit is eighteen inches. Two cubits is thirty-six inches, or three feet, which is 0.9 meters in the metric system. At that time, the Israelites' journey in one day was about fifteen miles, or twenty-four kilometers. God caused these quail to be less than one meter above the ground, making it convenient for the Israelites to catch them. The area covered was twenty-four kilometers by twenty-four kilometers, or 24,000 meters by 24,000 meters. Assuming there were ten quail in each cubic meter, according to what the Bible records, there would have been a total of 5.2 billion quail. If the total number of Israelites was two million, each person could receive 2,600 quail. In other words, each person could eat eighty-six quail per day, and in this way they could eat for a full month.

We see that what God supplied far exceeded what the Israelites needed. God is so rich that with just one gust of wind, He could enable the Israelites to eat meat for a full month. Actually, this was not the first time the Israelites ate quail. In Exodus chapter 16, after the Israelites left Egypt, they came to the Wilderness of Sin. At that time, the food supplies they had brought out of Egypt had already been eaten up. The Israelites then complained to Moses because of the matter of food, and even said that in Egypt they had sat by pots of meat and eaten to the full, but now they were about to die of hunger in the wilderness. At that time, God was not angry, because eating and drinking are normal needs for sustaining life. Even if the Israelites had not complained, God would still have found a way to solve the problem for them. God then said to Moses, as recorded in Exodus 16:12, "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread.' And you shall know that I am the LORD your God."

God wanted to use the supply of food to cause the Israelites to know the LORD God. That evening quail came, so that the Israelites could eat meat. The next morning, God gave manna and told the people of Israel that this was the food God had given them in the wilderness. Therefore, the first time the Israelites ate quail given by God, it did not provoke God's anger. Then why was this time different?

Verse 32: "And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) ; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp."

God blew a great quantity of quail from the sea, enough for the Israelites to eat for a full month. If the saints still remember, God wanted the Israelites first to cleanse themselves and separate themselves unto God, and only then could they eat meat. As a result, when the Israelites got up in the morning and saw so many quail, they completely forgot God's command and immediately began to catch quail. They caught them for a whole day, then a whole night, and then another whole day. In other words, the Israelites caught quail continuously for thirty-six hours.

They forgot that they first needed to sanctify themselves, and they also forgot that God would supply them with quail for a whole month. Actually, they only needed to catch the quail they needed each day with a thankful heart, just as they gathered manna every morning. This should have been a very joyful and easy matter. Yet the lust of their flesh was aroused, and they caught quail in great quantities, as if there would be none tomorrow. As a result, even the one who gathered the least gathered ten homers of quail.

A homer is a unit of volume, equivalent to 220 liters today. The units of volume include the homer, the ephah, and the omer. One homer equals ten ephahs, and one ephah equals ten omers. In Exodus 16:16-18, this is the teaching concerning the gathering of manna: "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need,' one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent. Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need."

At that time, when they gathered manna, they had already learned the lesson: each person's portion was one omer. Some people were more greedy and gathered more, but when it was measured, it was still one omer; he who gathered much had nothing left over. This was a lesson they had already learned. Unexpectedly, now because of the lust of the flesh, Israel caught quail without restraint. Even the one who gathered the least gathered ten homers, equivalent to 1,000 omers. One omer was the amount they could eat in one day. In other words, even the one who gathered the least gathered more than 1,000 times the amount.

They greedily caught great quantities of quail and spread the quail they had caught all around the camp. We do not know whether the Israelites were showing off or whether they wanted to dry the quail into jerky for the future. In any case, they completely forgot God's command. Instead, they were driven by the lust of the flesh, slaughtering quail in large quantities, completely violating the principle of God's grace. It was God who gave them extra grace so that they could eat meat for

a month. Yet they completely abused God's grace. Even the one who gathered the least caught 1,000 times the amount. This fully manifested the ugly image of being driven by lust.

Verse 33: "But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague."

God did not tolerate the Israelites' abuse of God's grace. As a result, while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, God's anger was aroused against them. The wording of the Bible is very vivid. The Israelites abused God's grace, caught great quantities of quail, and devoured meat greedily in large mouthfuls. As a result, before the meat had even been chewed, God's anger began to be aroused against them, and He struck them with a very great plague.

The KJV translates this phrase as "struck the people with a very great plague," meaning that God struck the Israelites with a very severe plague. This plague came from the hand of God. Actually, even if God had not acted, the Israelites had wantonly caught and slaughtered quail, leaving the ground full of quail blood, quail feathers, and uneaten quail meat. Under the scorching heat of a hot day, the decaying carcasses would very easily have caused a large-scale epidemic. As a result, because of this plague, many Israelites lost their lives.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is also a serious warning and admonition to the church today. We have all been redeemed by grace, and therefore when we come before God, we should always have a thankful heart. Although we received grace freely, on God's side He paid an extremely heavy price: God had to sacrifice His only begotten Son in order to accomplish the propitiation for us. We do not need to pay the price, and in fact we simply cannot afford to pay the price. Grace is free to us, but it is absolutely not cheap. Therefore, every time we apply God's grace, we must remember that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross for us, and that Jesus Christ paid a heavy price.

Therefore, we cannot waste God's grace, and even more, we cannot abuse God's grace. Paul says in the second half of Romans 5:20, "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more," Paul's purpose is to remind us that no matter how great the sin we have committed is, the grace of Christ is able to redeem us. Paul wants us to recognize the vastness of Christ's grace.

Then in Romans 6:1-2, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" We cannot remain in sin in order that grace may abound. This is wasting God's grace. We cannot live in sin; rather, after our sins have been forgiven, we must live out the newness of life.

Paul goes further in Galatians 5:24 and says, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Therefore, in the church we must be watchful. We cannot indulge the evil passions and desires of the flesh, but must crucify the flesh together with its evil passions and desires. By applying the fact that our old man has been crucified with Christ, we are enabled to be freed from the temptation of lust. If the church is not watchful and allows human lust to rule and reign in the church, it will also provoke God's anger. We must take this as a warning.

Verse 34: "So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving."

Moses had originally named this place Taberah, meaning that the fire of God burned among them. This was originally God's warning to the Israelites. Who would have known that the Israelites would not be watchful, but would instead be stirred up by the mixed multitude among them and greatly indulge the flesh, causing many people to be killed by the plague. This place then became Kibroth Hattaavah, that is, the graves of those who craved. Those among the Israelites who had developed craving died and were buried there. This was the first station after the Israelites officially entered the wilderness.

In other words, for the church today to set out in the wilderness of the world, the first station we must pass through is our own lust. Those who cannot overcome the lust of the flesh will be buried at the first station. Although we have already received grace and been saved, our old self is still present. We must be watchful and cannot waste God's grace, much less remain in the lust of the flesh. If we are occasionally overcome by lust, we must immediately come before God to repent and confess our sins, and apply the precious blood of Christ, so that our sins may be forgiven. We must never remain in the lust of the flesh, and even more, we must never indulge lust.

Verse 35: "From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth."

Those who had craved had all been buried at Kibroth Hattaavah, and the remaining Israelites then set out with the pillar of cloud and came to the next station, Hazeroth. God led the Israelites in the wilderness through station after station. This was the learning they had to have. It is the same with the church today. When the church begins to move forward, it will also pass through many stations. Numbers seems to be what God has prepared for the church today. What the Israelites experienced, we also must experience. The difficulties the Israelites encountered at each station will also be the difficulties we encounter. We must take them as warnings.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for showing us through Numbers that when the Israelites indulged the lust of the flesh and wasted God's grace, God raised up a plague to discipline them. We acknowledge that although we have already received grace and been saved, the old self is still very active, and the evil passions and desires of our flesh also often disturb us. Help us to often turn our eyes to Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith. It is not that we can overcome lust by ourselves, but that we continually depend on the grace of Jesus Christ and separate ourselves to become holy unto God. Only by continually abiding

in the grace of Jesus Christ can we avoid being disturbed by lust. Bless my daily living. I pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ!