

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

Numbers 12:1-8

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 12. Today we will read verses 1-8.

After Moses led the two million Israelites out of Egypt, three months later they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai. God led the Israelites to remain in the wilderness of Sinai for ten months and one week. This was perhaps the most important period in the history of the Israelites. They received God's law, built the tabernacle so that God could dwell among them, established the priestly and Levitical service system through Moses, and organized the twelve tribes of Israel into the army of the LORD. This period defined the Israelites, and Moses also became the person most highly respected by the Israelites.

After everything was prepared, on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after the Exodus, the Israelites sounded the silver trumpets and officially set out, entering the wilderness of Paran. Unexpectedly, at the very first station, they gave in to their craving and indulged the desires of the flesh, provoking God's anger. God sent a great plague and struck down many of those who had craved those things. Moses therefore named that place Kibroth Hattaavah, which means "the graves of craving."

However, there was still something positive that came out of this station, because Moses felt that the responsibility of managing the Israelites by himself was simply too heavy. So God took of the Spirit that was upon Moses and placed it upon seventy elders of Israel, so that they could share with Moses the responsibility of managing the Israelites. In other words, God distributed the administrative authority and raised up seventy elders to share the administrative responsibility with Moses.

After this, the Israelites continued their journey and came to their second station, Hazeroth. At this station, the leaders of Israel failed. Actually, this was not an isolated event, because at Moses' request, God had raised up seventy elders to share Moses' administrative authority. Administrative authority is connected with organization and can be shared. After the administrative authority was distributed, Moses and the seventy elders could more effectively share the responsibility of managing the Israelites.

On the other hand, spiritual authority is connected with life, originates from God, and is expressed through fellowship with God. This spiritual authority cannot be replaced or divided. Among a group of saints serving together as leaders, sometimes because of jealousy, and sometimes because of competition, it becomes difficult for them to submit to one another. The difficulties in the church often come from leaders who refuse to submit to one another, so that they cannot be of one accord. When the leaders of the church cannot be united, the church cannot move forward. This chapter of the Bible is a lesson that every saint who desires to be a leader must learn.

Verse 1: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman."

At the very beginning, it says that Moses married an Ethiopian woman. In Exodus chapter 2, because Moses had killed an Egyptian, he fled to Midian, where he was received by Reuel, the priest of Midian. Exodus 2:21 says, "Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses." After Moses married Zipporah, she bore him two sons. Later, Moses was called to go to Egypt to deliver the Israelites. Before they departed, Zipporah circumcised Moses' son and thereby saved Moses. This shows that Zipporah was a decisive woman.

Later, Moses went to Egypt by himself, led the Israelites out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and came to Mount Sinai. Exodus 18:5 says, "And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God." Moses' wife Zipporah therefore remained with

Moses. After this, there is no further record concerning Moses' wife until the first verse of this chapter, which says that Moses married an Ethiopian woman. Who exactly was this Ethiopian woman? Commentators have two explanations.

The first explanation is that Zipporah had died, and Moses remarried, taking an Ethiopian woman as his wife. Cush is what we know today as Ethiopia. The original meaning of this word is "black". In other words, Moses married a Black woman. However, the Bible contains no record whatsoever that Zipporah had died. Furthermore, Moses was extremely busy in the wilderness of Sinai, where he stayed for ten months, until they officially set out and arrived at Hazeroth. He never left during this period. If he had married another Ethiopian woman, she would apparently have been one of the mixed multitude among the Israelites, and this does not seem consistent with Moses' character.

Therefore, I am more inclined toward the second explanation: that this Ethiopian woman was actually Zipporah. Zipporah was a Midianite, and the Midianites descended from Midian, the son of Abraham by another wife, Keturah, whom Abraham married after Sarah died. Genesis 25:2 says that Keturah "bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah." Midian became the ancestor of the Midianites. The Midianites lived in the Arabian Peninsula and the Sinai Peninsula and normally made their living as nomadic people. Therefore, the area in which they lived was quite extensive.

According to Genesis 10:6, Cush was the son of Ham. The Cushites once produced Nimrod, who established a great empire, and therefore the Cushites spread throughout various regions. The Midianites and Cushites may have had some interaction. The word Cush means "black", perhaps emphasizing Zipporah's dark complexion.

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married. Miriam was Moses' sister. When Moses was still an infant and had been hidden in a basket of bulrushes, Miriam boldly stepped forward and helped save Moses when Pharaoh's daughter discovered him. Miriam was also a prophetess.

After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, she led the women in praising God. Exodus 15:20–21 says, “Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, ‘Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!’”

Miriam was a leader among the Israelites. Why, then, did Miriam choose this particular time to speak against Moses because of Zipporah? Perhaps before Zipporah came, Miriam was naturally the leader among the women. Now that Zipporah had come, she had somewhat taken away some of Miriam’s prominence as a leader.

Aaron was Moses’ older brother and the high priest among the Israelites. Both Miriam and Aaron were leaders among the Israelites. They were highly respected among the people, and they were Moses’ older sister and older brother. Yet now they spoke against Moses because his wife was an Ethiopian. Miriam’s name is mentioned before Aaron’s, indicating that Miriam was the one who initiated this incident.

Verse 2: “So they said, ‘Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?’ And the LORD heard it.”

This verse reveals the real reason why Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses. Moses’ marriage to an Ethiopian woman was merely their excuse. The real reason was that they were leaders among the Israelites just as Moses was, and they were jealous of the honor Moses enjoyed among the people.

They saw that the seventy elders could share Moses’ administrative authority, and they assumed that they could also share Moses’ spiritual authority. They knew that spiritual authority comes from God and is expressed through fellowship with God. So they asked, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” They brought up the fact that God also spoke through

them in order to elevate their own position, at least to make themselves equal with Moses.

Spiritual authority cannot be divided or replaced. They were jealous of Moses' spiritual authority, and Moses was also their younger brother. Therefore, they refused to submit to Moses' authority.

Dear brothers and sisters, when the saints come together to bear the responsibility of the church, we must learn to submit to leaders who are mature in life. We cannot consider ourselves better than others. Only in this way can there be one accord among the leaders.

Although Moses was the youngest of the three, he was the most mature in life. When Miriam and Aaron questioned his spiritual authority, Moses said absolutely nothing. He did not defend himself. This was a manifestation of his mature life: he entrusted everything to God. The LORD heard Miriam and Aaron's questioning. Moses remained silent, but the LORD spoke on Moses' behalf.

Verse 3: "(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)"

This verse is the Holy Spirit's evaluation of Moses. "The man Moses was very humble." The word "humble" is translated as meek in the KJV, meaning gentle or mild.

Moses was humble and gentle. He never fought for power or contended for his own rights. Even when he was treated unjustly, he did not defend himself. He would rather endure mistreatment than stand up for himself. When his own sister and brother spoke against him, he remained silent. Therefore, the Holy Spirit testified concerning him that he was "very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." Although Moses did not speak for himself, the LORD could not remain silent on his behalf.

Dear brothers and sisters, is this not beautiful? If we are treated unjustly, and we are willing to treat others with meekness and are unwilling to defend ourselves, the result is that God Himself will not allow the matter to remain unresolved. God Himself will come forward on our behalf and reveal His heart to those who mistreat us. This is far better than defending ourselves. However, this requires an extremely mature measure of life—a willingness to entrust everything into God’s hands and allow God to take control.

Verse 4: “Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, ‘Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!’ So the three came out.”

The word “suddenly” is used very well here. In other words, Miriam and Aaron had been refusing to submit to Moses’ spiritual authority for some time. They were Moses’ relatives and were older than Moses. They had also helped Moses in the past. Now God had clearly placed Moses in a position of spiritual authority, and they became uncomfortable in their hearts. They began to look for faults in Moses in their daily life and speak against him.

God seemed to allow this situation to continue for a period of time, but they did not repent. Suddenly, God appeared. God’s patience gives people time to repent. However, when God’s patience reaches its balance point with His righteousness, God will act. What may seem sudden to man is not sudden to God. It means that God’s patience has come to an end and judgment is about to begin. So God commanded Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!” And the three of them came out.

Verse 5: “Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward.”

The LORD came down in the pillar of cloud. When the Israelites were encamped, the pillar of cloud was above the Holy of Holies. Now God was going to speak, so

He came down in the pillar of cloud and stood at the door of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the place where God dwelt among the Israelites. The entrance of the tabernacle was like a temporary courtroom established by God. The LORD called Aaron and Miriam forward. The two of them were like the defendants.

Yet there was no plaintiff, because Moses did not defend himself. God Himself came to arbitrate. He summoned Aaron and Miriam forward, and God Himself spoke on Moses' behalf. The following verses, verses 6–8, are God's judgment. When God gives His judgment, it is the conclusion, and there is no longer any room for man to speak.

Verse 6: "Then He said, 'Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.'"

"Hear now My words." When God speaks, man must listen. God seems to be saying, "The two of you have spoken too much. You have not exercised restraint, and you have even spoken things you should not have said. Now be quiet and listen to Me." "If there is a prophet among you." A prophet is someone who speaks for God. Prophets communicate God's heart to His people. Before a prophet speaks, there must first be God's speaking. Only then can the prophet accurately communicate God's heart. "I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream."

Here God reveals the general pattern by which He speaks to prophets. God makes Himself known through visions and speaks through dreams. In other words, the prophet himself is completely passive and receives revelation through a special experience: seeing in a vision and hearing in a dream.

For example, in Daniel chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a terrifying dream, but after waking up, he forgot the dream. As a result, he demanded that someone tell him both the dream and its interpretation. God used Daniel to interpret the dream for the king. Daniel 2:19 says, "Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night

vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.” God revealed the matter to Daniel in a vision.

The same principle continued in the New Testament. When the gospel was about to turn toward the Gentiles, Peter was having difficulty keeping up with what God was doing. Acts 10:10–13 says, “Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’” God caused Peter to fall into a trance, and Peter saw the vision of the great sheet. God also declared to Peter that what God had cleansed, man must not call common.

Therefore, God says that He reveals what He wants to say to prophets through visions and dreams. Miriam herself was a prophetess, so she naturally understood these things.

Verse 7: “Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house.”

God immediately spoke on Moses’ behalf: “Not so with My servant Moses.” God defended Moses and placed Moses in a higher position. Ordinary prophets received God’s revelation through visions and dreams, but Moses was different. Moses was God’s servant, and he was faithful in all God’s house. God first testified that in his work, Moses was a faithful servant. He served God’s people completely according to God’s will. He was faithful in all God’s house.

Moses’ faithfulness was demonstrated by his complete submission to God’s authority. Therefore, he could become God’s representative authority. A person who cannot submit to authority can never become God’s representative authority. Therefore, God’s first argument was Moses’ faithfulness. He was completely faithful to the commission God had given him and served the Israelites completely according to God’s will.

Verse 8: “I speak with him face to face, Even plainly and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?”

The previous verse speaks of Moses’ complete faithfulness in his work. This verse speaks of the way God fellowshiped with Moses, which was completely different from His fellowship with other prophets. God spoke with Moses face to face, not through visions or dreams, but while Moses was fully conscious. God spoke with him face to face and plainly, without dark sayings. Therefore, Moses did not need to guess. Moses could completely understand God’s meaning.

Not only was there a direct channel of fellowship between Moses and God; Moses could also see the form of the LORD. The word translated “form” in the Chinese Union Version means form or likeness in English. This should point to Exodus chapter 33, where Moses asked God to show him His glory. God said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” Nevertheless, God accommodated Moses.

Exodus 33:21–23 says, “And the LORD said, ‘Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.’” Although Moses did not see God’s face, Moses did see God’s back.

God first spoke on Moses’ behalf. In his work, Moses was completely faithful; in fellowship, he spoke with God face to face, without dark sayings. After God defended Moses, He brought forth His judgment: “Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?” God’s judgment ends with a question, which is very special. After all, Miriam and Aaron were leaders among the Israelites and were also vessels whom God used. They had sinned, and God pointed it out directly, but then He asked, “Why then were you not afraid?” God was still giving them room to confess their sin and repent. We see that God was still full of mercy and grace.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the church today, coworkers who serve together must often carry a heart of reverence. Among coworkers, we should respect those saints

who are mature in life and possess spiritual authority. We should not easily criticize or judge others, lest we fall under God's judgment ourselves. We must learn that when we come together, each person should regard others as better than himself and actively seek to know whom he should submit to. Only saints who are willing to place themselves in the lowest position can receive the greatest measure of grace. For grace is like water: it flows toward the lowest place.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. You have shown us that in order to become an authority, we must first learn to submit to authority. Moses was completely faithful and completely submissive to Your authority. He was also meek; when he was mistreated, he was unwilling to defend himself. Moses is a good example for us as we serve in the church today. Help us also to become faithful and meek people, willing to entrust everything into the gracious hands of the Lord and allow the Lord to take control. Bless the church where I am and all the coworkers in the church, that we may serve the church of God together in one accord. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.