

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

Numbers 13: 30-33

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 13. Today, we are reading verses 30 through 33.

Moses sent 12 spies to scout out the land of Canaan. After 40 days, they returned to Moses, Aaron, and the whole congregation of Israel at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran, and reported on what they had observed. I believe they didn't first hold an internal discussion to reach a balanced consensus report—rather, each gave his own view freely and individually.

Among these 12 men, 10 gave a negative, discouraging report—the clear majority. Only Caleb of the tribe of Judah and Joshua of the tribe of Ephraim gave a positive, encouraging report. This resembles today's church, where a group of coworkers together bears responsibility for the church. When something unexpected happens and a decision must be made, there are usually both negative and positive reactions.

Should the church follow majority rule? Or should there be a different way of reaching decisions? This is a very practical question. I hope that through sharing on this passage, we can all reflect on it. Finally, the saints who serve together as coworkers in the church need to find together, the way God leads in decision-making.

Most Christians today have been exposed to science and have some basic knowledge of psychology. To help preserve human survival, God gave people an instinct called negativity bias. That is, among the information we receive, negative and discouraging messages get amplified and leave a deeper impression, even overshadowing positive, encouraging messages.

For example: you go hiking, and the whole way the scenery is beautiful and pleasant—but then you happen to spot, in the grass by the trail, the one snake you hate most. Even though this is just a tiny fragment of the entire trip, you'll most likely end up giving the whole hike a negative rating. This is actually a survival instinct, helping us avoid dangerous things.

These 12 spies all saw that the good land of Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey, with fertile soil and abundant crops—indeed a suitable place for the Israelites to live. At the same time, all 12 spies also saw that the inhabitants of Canaan were tall and strong, and their cities were fortified and large. Of these, 10 spies gave in to the instinct of negativity bias—they reported the good news only briefly, while unconsciously magnifying the bad news. In particular, they saw the giants of the Anakim, and saw five different peoples occupying the Negev, the hill country, and the coastal area of Canaan. In other words, there seemed to be no place left for the Israelites to live. Having heard the negative report of the ten spies, let's read verse 30.

Verse 30: "Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.'"

What Caleb saw in the land of Canaan was exactly the same as what the ten spies who gave the bad report saw. But he did not fall into the snare of negativity bias—he immediately stood up to calm the people. We should recognize that it wasn't only the ten spies who actually went to scout who had negativity bias—the Israelites who heard the report also had it. When they heard the bad news reported by the ten spies, every one of them was terrified. When people become afraid, their mouths naturally speak words of despair and discouragement. Some even began to weep and complain after hearing these words.

Caleb was one of the twelve spies, so he had every right to voice his own opinion and view. So he immediately stood up, first calming the discouraged and disheartened people before Moses, and spoke completely different words: "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it." Once a

majority opinion has been voiced and has won the audience's agreement, it is not easy to speak up with an opposing minority view, and it's even harder to urge the audience to take the opposite action immediately. Why was Caleb not held captive by negativity bias? How was he even able to cry out loudly, urging the Israelites to go up and take the land at once?

We need to look at this on two levels. First, on the human level: modern psychology, having identified negativity bias, knows that it causes many people to hold back and lose the chance to try. In response, psychology developed a corresponding method called positive thinking. It encourages people to shift from negative to positive, from pessimistic to optimistic, producing positive action by thinking more about positive things. This is a human method—helping people escape negativity bias on the psychological level.

Unfortunately, some Christian groups also make heavy use of this method, encouraging people to produce positive action through positive thinking. But this is an illusion, because positive thinking does not actually change the environment itself. For a small number of people who are especially psychologically fragile, positive thinking might give them courage to try. But for most people, the environment they face does not change. Just as the Israelites faced the Anakim giants—that environment wasn't going to change. So how could they overcome it?

Therefore, what the church should emphasize is not positive thinking, but another dimension—the dimension of God. I call this "faith leading," or the guidance of faith. Caleb dared to loudly encourage the Israelites to go up and take the land at once, declaring that they would overcome. This was not positive thinking—it was laying hold of God's promise in faith.

The Anakim were tall, the cities were fortified—he saw all this with his own eyes. But he also knew that God had led them out of Egypt precisely to bring them back to Canaan. That was the land God had promised to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He had clearly said that their descendants would possess that land as an inheritance. Since God had already promised it, God would fulfill His

promise. Therefore, we need only follow God's guidance in faith, and we will obtain what God has promised.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the church life of today, coworkers also frequently face many circumstances requiring decisions. Yet among coworkers, there will often be a majority who rely on what they can see, and on the experience they've already learned from the world, and who give negative opinions when problems arise. At such a time, can you be like Caleb? Do you dare to boldly hold fast to God's promise alone, and encourage the saints to move forward in faith?

Verse 31: "But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.'"

When Caleb encouraged the people of Israel to bravely go forward and take possession of the land, the other ten who had reported bad news immediately came out in opposition, saying we are not able to go up, for they are stronger than we are. What people saw with their physical eyes was simply "them" versus "us"—and in fact, they were indeed stronger than we were. Weren't we going to attack them like throwing an egg against a rock? We would surely fail.

These ten spies remained stuck in trusting only what the eyes of the flesh could see. They had no faith, and so they also could not see that, in faith, it was God who would fight for them. If they had learned to compare God with the inhabitants of that land, the outcome would naturally have been different. Yet only those who live by faith can see what God is about to do. Caleb saw it. Joshua saw it. But the other ten spies did not see it.

Dear brothers and sisters, this reminds us of an important key point: coworkers in the church must frequently come together, communicate, and share their vision for the church. And together before God, seek how the church should move forward—through prayer, together seeking God's leading. If coworkers can together receive, in faith, a unified vision that God gives the church, it will naturally become easier for them to come together, following God's leading in faith.

Verse 32: "And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature.'"

Once those who brought the bad report took the lead, negativity bias immediately raised its head. Other spies joined in agreement, saying that the land they had scouted and passed through was a land that devours its inhabitants. Canaan was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey, with abundant produce—everyone agreed on that. The real problem was the inhabitants of that land.

There were five different peoples there, occupying different areas, and they frequently fought among themselves over resources. Whoever held good resources would quickly have other peoples come to seize them, so fighting among the inhabitants never ceased, and people were often killed—hence it became "a land that devours its inhabitants." Their point was that if the Israelites also became inhabitants of that land, they too would be devoured in the same way. Because the people living in that land were all tall in stature and skilled at seizing and fighting, the Israelites were simply no match for them.

Verse 33: "There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

These ten spies who reported bad news couldn't stop thinking about having seen the Anakim, who were giants—descendants of giants. The Chinese Union Version translates this as "great men" (偉人), which is not an accurate translation, because in Chinese, that term usually refers to someone of noble, great character. The Hebrew word here is actually Nephilim; transliterated directly, it would be "Nephilim ren." It refers to their great physical stature, so a better translation would be "giants." This word Nephilim first appears in Genesis 6:4, "There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came

in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown."

The "giants" in this verse should also be translated as "giants" (rather than "great men"). This verse tells us that these giants were born when the sons of God came together with the daughters of men—their bodies were enormous, unlike ordinary people. Of course, there are many different interpretations of this passage. Saints who are interested are welcome to review the daily Bible reading for Genesis chapter 6. Here I'll simply share the interpretation I prefer: the "sons of God" refers to fallen angels—as Jude 1:6 says, those angels who did not keep their proper domain but left their own abode. They took on human form and came together with the daughters of men, producing giants who were between human and angelic in nature.

We know that in God's creation in Genesis chapter 1, everything was made "according to its kind." These giants violated the order God had established in creation; their appearance would have completely displaced the humanity God had created. Therefore God had to bring judgment—God destroyed that generation of people with a flood, leaving only Noah's family of eight, who were saved through the ark.

Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—then received God's command anew, to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. They became the ancestors of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Now, nearly 2000 years later, the Anakim appeared again in the land of Canaan—descendants of the giants. This immediately raises a question: weren't the Nephilim, the giants, all drowned in the flood? How could they reappear?

The most reasonable explanation is that the wives of Shem, Ham, and Japheth may have carried a recessive gene for giants. Over this long span of time of reproduction, if two carriers of this recessive gene happened to have children together, giants could be born again—the Anakim may have arisen in this way. The Anakim were tall in stature and mighty in strength; as a result, these ten spies who

brought the bad report said that compared to these giants, we saw ourselves as like grasshoppers—utterly insignificant.

If the giants simply stepped down with one foot, they would crush us to death. Not only did we see ourselves as like grasshoppers, but they saw us the same way too. In their eyes we counted for even less. How then could we, a group of grasshoppers, possibly go and take possession of the good land of Canaan? The metaphor here is extremely vivid—the Israelites compared themselves to grasshoppers, and once this kind of talk spread, it immediately threw the whole nation of Israel into panic and confusion. The power of a metaphor to spread and to wound far exceeds that of a plain statement of fact.

Sometimes, in order to vent or speak sharply, we use metaphors to describe things inappropriately; we need to be careful, because the consequences brought by such metaphors are often far more severe than simply stating the facts plainly. May God have mercy, that we would all learn to guard our tongues.

Let us pray together: Lord, help us, set us apart. In every matter we encounter, teach us to bring it before You, to learn to accept the leading of the Holy Spirit in faith—not making our final decisions based on what our physical eyes see. Especially in the process of serving the church, show special grace to the coworkers who serve together, that we may all learn to bow down together before God: laying hold of God's promises in faith, and together following the Holy Spirit's leading for the church in faith. Lord, bless the church I belong to, that we would be willing to walk the path of faith, rather than going by sight, and not follow the customs of the world. And may we know that what God has prepared for the church is all the finest spiritual blessing. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ