

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

Numbers 14:1-9

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 14. Today we will read verses 1-9.

Moses sent twelve spies to spy out the land of Canaan for forty days. Afterward, they returned to the Wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh, and reported the results of their exploration to Moses, Aaron, and the whole congregation of Israel. All twelve spies acknowledged that it was a land flowing with milk and honey: the land was fertile, its produce was abundant, and it truly was a good land suitable for habitation.

However, when it came to the inhabitants of the land, they gave completely different reports. The ten spies, according to what they saw with their physical eyes, brought back a bad report, saying that it was a land that devoured its inhabitants. In other words, the people were fierce and violent, given to killing, burning, and plundering. If a person could not defend himself, he would be devoured. In particular, there were descendants of Anak among them. They were descendants of giants, tall and powerful. In their presence, we were like grasshoppers. Caleb from the tribe of Judah stood up to quiet the people and encouraged the Israelites to go up and take possession of the land. But Caleb's voice was completely drowned out by the negative report.

Dear brothers and sisters, when the church is moving forward in the wilderness of this world, we will often encounter things that are great and difficult. If we insist on looking only at what our physical eyes can see and try to deal with everything by our own methods, the result will be just like that of the Israelites in the wilderness: we will be overwhelmed by negative and discouraging words, until the whole congregation falls into fear and panic. The test that the whole congregation of Israel experienced in the wilderness is exactly the kind of test that the church frequently

faces today. I hope that when we read this passage of Scripture, we will not think of it merely as the history of the Israelites three thousand five hundred years ago, but that we will learn from it and receive its lessons.

For Satan is still the same. He is constantly looking for opportunities to corrupt God's people. Whether it was the Israelites in the Old Testament or the church in the New Testament, on the surface it may seem to be merely human weakness and unbelief. But if we look more deeply, it is Satan seeking to use these weak people to corrupt God's plan of redemption, which He established before the foundation of the world. May God give us spiritual understanding, so that we will not fall into Satan's schemes and snares. For the Israelites in the Old Testament, Satan sought to destroy God's plan of redemption, as described in Ephesians 1:7–8; and for the saints in the New Testament, Satan is still looking for breaches and weaknesses in the church in order to destroy God's plan of bringing all things together in one, as described in Ephesians 1:9–10. May God have mercy on us.

Verse 1: “So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.”

The whole congregation of Israel heard the ten spies give an evil report and compare the Israelites to grasshoppers, saying that there was no way they could stand against the giants of the descendants of Anak. Negative and discouraging emotions immediately spread throughout the whole congregation of Israel. As a result, the whole congregation lifted up their voices and cried out. Some wept because they were afraid; some complained because they were discouraged; some cursed because they were angry; and even more were helpless because they were in despair. They completely lost the rest and order that come from having God's presence. They lost their goal, had no direction, no discernment of their own, and became a blind crowd that was easily controlled by others.

“And the people wept that night.” These emotions of sorrow, discouragement, disappointment, and fear continued to ferment throughout the entire night, and the sound of their crying continued throughout the night. Dear brothers and sisters,

when people focus only on the difficulties of their circumstances, the evil heart of unbelief will begin to ferment, causing them to completely forget God's grace and fall into emptiness and despair. This is exactly Satan's scheme. Those ten spies who brought back a bad report actually became Satan's instruments. They spread words of unbelief throughout the congregation of Israel, causing the whole congregation to fall into panic. Without realizing it, they were being led by Satan and were making a declaration of rebellion against God.

Verse 2: "And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!'"

Moses was the leader called by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the good land of Canaan that God had promised. Aaron was the high priest anointed by God to bring the Israelites before God. Now the Israelites accepted the evil report given by the ten spies, and after allowing it to ferment for an entire night, they began to complain against Moses and Aaron. Although the congregation of Israel liked to complain whenever they encountered difficulties, this time was different, and it brought tremendous disaster upon the whole congregation. We need to look carefully at the consequences produced when a blind congregation is stirred up by Satan.

First, they complained to Moses and Aaron: "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!" In other words, they would rather die than continue moving forward. Why did this happen? The answer is found in the next verse.

Verse 3: "Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

The whole congregation of Israel was not merely complaining against Moses and Aaron; they were directing their accusation toward God. They questioned God's will and questioned God's leading. Why did God bring us to the land of Canaan? The inhabitants of that land are strong, their cities are fortified, and there are giants from the descendants of Anak. If we enter the land of Canaan, we will fall by their swords, and our wives and children will be taken captive. Would it not be better for us to turn back now and return to Egypt? They had completely fallen into the circumstances they saw with their physical eyes. They measured themselves and concluded that they had no confidence whatsoever of winning the battle. Therefore, they questioned God's will and God's leading, thinking that they should never have left Egypt in the first place.

How many miracles had they experienced during the past year or more? At that time, Egypt had the most powerful army, yet was it not drowned in the Red Sea? They had a congregation of two million people, and they had traveled through the wilderness for more than a year, yet they had not starved to death. God had sent manna down from heaven and caused water to flow from the rock to supply their needs. The characteristic of an ungrateful person is forgetfulness. No matter how much grace he has received in the past, the moment he encounters difficulty, he forgets it all and begins to complain against God, even questioning God's leading.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must constantly give thanks. Every time we experience God's grace, we should turn that experience of grace into prayer and store it up before God. The next time we encounter difficulty, those prayers of thanksgiving from the past will become a reminder to us: God has led us through various difficulties before and helped us experience His grace. Is this not another opportunity to experience grace? In this way, difficulty will no longer be merely difficulty, but will become a blessing in disguise for us. Sadly, the congregation of Israel experienced God's tremendous grace in vain because they did not know how to give thanks. They became an ungrateful congregation.

Verse 4: "So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.'"

Moses and Aaron were leaders appointed by God, but the Israelites wanted to appoint another leader of their own to lead them back to Egypt. What they rejected was not merely Moses and Aaron; they were rejecting God Himself. At this point, Satan's scheme was completely exposed, and the Israelites had unknowingly become instruments of Satan.

The Israelites may not have known God's eternal will, but Satan knew. The Israelites were standing at a critical point. They did not know it, but Satan did. What do I mean? Ever since the forefathers of the human race failed and fell in the Garden of Eden, God had promised that the Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. This was also God's plan of redemption established before the foundation of the world.

God first chose Abraham from among the created nations to follow Him, and promised Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years and afterward return to the land of Canaan to inherit the possession God had promised. The Israelites at this very moment were about to fulfill God's promise, take possession of the land of Canaan, and establish the nation of Israel there.

When the fullness of time came, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, would become flesh, being conceived in the womb of a virgin of Israel and born in Bethlehem. The Son of God would destroy the devil, who had the power of death, through the cross and accomplish God's plan of redemption. Satan knew this. Therefore, he wanted to prevent the Israelites from entering the land of Canaan and taking possession of it. And this group of unbelieving Israelites actually became instruments that Satan used to destroy God's plan.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must learn a lesson from this example. Sometimes one act of unbelief on our part does not merely cause us personal loss; it may also be exactly what Satan uses as an instrument to destroy God's plan. God desired to accomplish His plan of redemption through the obedience of the Israelites. This was the mission of Israel as God's chosen people in the Old Testament.

Then what is the mission God has entrusted to us as His chosen people in the New Testament? Ephesians 1:9–10 says, "having made known to us the mystery of His

will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

It turns out that God desires the New Testament church to accomplish His plan of bringing all things together in one, so that all things may be gathered together in Christ. And the execution of this plan of bringing all things together in one is described in Ephesians 1:22–23, “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

The church is to become the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head, and He is to rule over all things as Head over all. If we today in the church do not submit to Christ’s lordship, preventing Christ from being the Head in the church, then how can Christ be the Head over all things? Therefore, when we refuse to submit to Christ’s lordship today, it is just like the Israelites of that time refusing to submit to God and enter the good land to receive their inheritance. This is not merely our personal failure; it also hinders the execution of God’s plan to bring all things together in one. I hope that we can all learn and receive instruction from the example of the Israelites.

Verse 5: “Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.”

Moses and Aaron were the representative authorities of God at that time. When the Israelites rose up against them and wanted to choose another leader to lead them back to Egypt, Moses and Aaron became the objects of the Israelites’ attack. They no longer had any position from which to defend themselves.

They knew that the Israelites had committed a great sin. Their hearts were deeply grieved, yet they had no position from which to speak. They could only fall on their faces before God and silently intercede for the Israelites, asking God to forgive them.

Verse 6: “But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;”

At this moment, the ones who had the position to speak were the twelve spies. They were eyewitnesses. They could give a different report and change the atmosphere of the situation. The ten spies who had given the bad report remained silent. Perhaps they were even taking pleasure in what was happening. It was their report that had caused such a great shock. Perhaps they even thought that they had done something great. Joshua the son of Nun from the tribe of Ephraim and Caleb the son of Jephunneh from the tribe of Judah stood up and tore their clothes, giving a completely opposite testimony.

Among the whole congregation of Israel, there were more than six hundred thousand men who were twenty years old and above. Every one of them had been influenced by the ten spies and wanted to appoint a new leader and return to Egypt. In such a highly charged situation, it was truly not easy to courageously stand up and speak to a crowd that had lost its reason. But Joshua and Caleb were courageous leaders who were willing to take responsibility. The more difficult the situation became, the more they were willing to face the difficulty. They courageously bore the responsibility entrusted to them. This also laid the groundwork for the future kings who would come from the tribes of Judah and Ephraim.

Among the twelve spies, ten reported bad news according to what they saw with their physical eyes, while two reported good news according to God’s promises and in faith. This did not happen merely three thousand five hundred years ago; it is also a situation that the church frequently faces today.

When the church needs to make difficult decisions, most coworkers will evaluate the situation according to what they see with their physical eyes. Only a small number of coworkers are able to see God’s promises by faith. Therefore, if the affairs of the church are decided by voting, the church will most likely make the wrong decision. Perhaps this is also the fundamental reason why most churches today are weak. The church should not operate on the principle that the minority

submits to the majority. Rather, true spiritual authority should be able to emerge and have its place in the church.

If those ten spies had all recognized Joshua as their spiritual covering, then if they had an opinion, they could have brought it to Joshua and fellowshiped with him about it. The final report could then have been entrusted to Joshua. Naturally, the result would have been different.

Joshua was Moses' assistant and outstanding among the younger generation. He should have been more spiritual, and a person who truly possesses spiritual authority will not easily exercise that authority. Therefore, the problem was not with Joshua but with those ten spies. If they had truly submitted to Joshua's spiritual authority, this incident would not have happened.

The same is true in the church today. When coworkers come together to serve, each one must first seek out the person to whom he can submit. And a person who truly possesses spiritual authority will not easily exercise that authority. Instead, he will be willing to listen to the opinions of the other coworkers. Through sufficient fellowship, they can reach a united consensus and then make a decision. If this can be practiced, coworkers will naturally be able to serve in one accord.

Verses 7–8: “and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: ‘The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, “a land which flows with milk and honey.””

Joshua and Caleb once again reported to the whole congregation that the land of Canaan through which they had passed and which they had explored truly was an exceedingly good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The land was fertile and its produce was abundant. If the LORD delighted in them, He would surely bring them into that land and give it to them.

They must have heard the rebellious words spoken by the congregation, so they immediately stepped forward to lead the congregation and told them that the most important thing was this: “If the LORD delights in us.” In other words, if all of us please God, God will give us that land. The real key was not whether the inhabitants of the land were strong, but whether God delighted in us.

If God delights in us, He will surely fight for us. What, then, are the inhabitants of that land? God will bring us into the land and give it to us. What we need to do is please God.

How can we please God? We must all set ourselves apart to God and live holy lives. This was precisely what Moses had been leading them to learn during the more than ten months they spent preparing in the Wilderness of Sinai: how to make themselves holy and set apart to God. Once everything was ready, they formally entered the Wilderness of Paran. How could they completely forget all their previous preparation as soon as they encountered difficulty?

Verse 9: “Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them.”

Joshua and Caleb recognized the urgency of the situation from the congregation’s complaints against Moses and Aaron. They were not merely complaining against the leaders; they had already rebelled against God. Therefore, they cried out loudly: Do not rebel against the LORD, and do not fear the inhabitants of the land. Although they were strong and powerful, although they were aggressive and competitive, they are our food. The ten spies saw the inhabitants of Canaan as tall and powerful, and therefore saw themselves as grasshoppers. But Joshua and Caleb said that they were our food.

Food is given to people to eat, and after eating it, people gain strength. Those without faith look at the difficulties they face and see the giants of Anak. Then they despise themselves and see themselves as grasshoppers. But people with faith see

difficulties as food—as something that helps them advance, nourishes them, and gives them strength.

Of course, the manna that God provided every day is our daily spiritual food. This is the supply we must have for our growth. But after we eat the manna, God will also arrange various circumstances to become our food. Perhaps we can regard our circumstances as vitamins that are necessary for our growth in life. Some circumstances can increase our eyesight; some can strengthen our muscles; some can increase our endurance. Every circumstance is for our good, and every circumstance helps us grow. The giants of Anak are even like powerful nutritional supplements for us, enlarging our spiritual capacity.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we serve together in the church and encounter difficulties, do not retreat and do not run away, because these very things are the food God has prepared for us. If coworkers can move forward together in faith, they will be able to experience together and grow together. Every difficulty should enlarge the church's capacity and strengthen the church's testimony. And "their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us." Every battle is never merely about what can be seen on the surface; behind it there is a deeper spiritual battle. Just as Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Just as God promised Abraham in those days, Genesis 15:16 says, "But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." The inhabitants of Canaan had not yet reached the fullness of their wickedness, and therefore God gave them four hundred years. Now their wickedness had reached its fullness. Their protection had departed from them. The LORD would lead us back into the land of Canaan. God was with us; therefore, do not fear them. Joshua and Caleb cried out to the Israelites in faith. Before the enraged congregation of Israel, they courageously stood up and testified for God, attempting to turn the situation around. Such courage and such willingness to bear responsibility are truly worthy of our learning and imitation.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You! You have placed the examples of Joshua and Caleb before us. When they faced the rebellious Israelites, they were able to courageously stand up and declare that every kind of difficulty was food that You had given them. In the same way, the church today also faces many difficulties. Lord, give us courage; give us the willingness to bear responsibility, so that we may become the Joshua and Caleb of today. May we not only determine in our hearts to please God ourselves, but also influence the saints around us to pursue holiness together and to please God. In this way, every kind of difficulty will naturally become our food. Lord, use us so that for the sake of God's interests, we may stand firm for You in the church. Bless the church where You have placed me, that it may be a church that pleases You. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.