

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Numbers 14:10–19

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 14. Today, we are reading verses 10 through 19.

The entire congregation of Israel grew utterly disheartened by the report of the ten spies. They not only grumbled against Moses and Aaron, but also questioned God's will and leadership, even reaching the point of wanting to appoint a new leader to take them back to Egypt. Moses and Aaron were the direct targets of this assault; unable to defend themselves, they could only fall on their faces. Joshua and Caleb then stepped forward and called out to the Israelites in faith: The land of Canaan is indeed a land flowing with milk and honey. Do not fear the people of the land, for they are our bread. As long as we please the Lord, He will lead us into this promised land and give it to us as an inheritance. Joshua and Caleb were able to stand before the congregation of Israel to bear a contrasting testimony, encouraging the Israelites to hold fast to God's promises in faith. Now let us look at the response of the Israelites.

Verse 10: "And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel."

The Israelites were like a mob that had lost all their minds, falling completely into the snare of Satan. They simply could not bear to hear words of faith, shouting loudly to stone the two of them. Dear brothers and sisters, mob movements are blind and terrifying. They are blind, unable to see God's promises; they are also narrow-minded, impulsive, and reckless, going so far as to silence all dissenting voices and even attempting to stone Joshua and Caleb to death.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus always deliberately avoided the crowds. When Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, the crowd wanted to take Him by force to make Him king, but Jesus immediately withdrew alone to the mountain. Jesus cared deeply about each individual who was willing to follow Him wholeheartedly, yet He was unwilling to accomplish anything through mob movements, because the crowd that acclaims Jesus today may crucify Him on the cross tomorrow. Today, some religious figures like to leverage the power of the crowd to expand the church's influence, but that very same crowd can also corrupt the purity of the church and harm those who genuinely seek to follow the Lord.

Joshua and Caleb attempted to turn the congregation of Israel back, yet the congregation sought to stone them. Moses and Aaron remained prostrate on the ground, powerless to save them. At that very moment, the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before the children of Israel. The Israelites seemed to have forgotten that God was still with them, and that God's tabernacle was still in their midst. God would not allow this farce to continue; God intervened to protect His servants. The moment God appeared, the tabernacle was filled with His glory. As soon as the Israelites saw the Lord manifest His glory, they ceased what they were doing. God did not speak to the Israelites; He spoke to Moses.

Verse 11: "Then the Lord said to Moses: 'How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?'"

The glory of God appeared. God completely disregarded the rioting people and spoke directly with Moses. While Moses was prostrated on the ground because of the people's complaints, God exalted Moses by delivering judgment on the Israelites right before him. God said to Moses: How long will these people reject Me?

As it turned out, God heard everything the Israelites said, and God saw everything the Israelites did. God immediately proclaimed in judgment: How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which

I have performed among them? God had repeatedly saved and provided for the Israelites, performing countless signs and wonders. The original purpose of miracles was to lead people to believe in God.

Jesus performed His first miracle at the wedding in Cana by turning water into wine. In John 2:11, “This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.” The purpose of Jesus displaying signs was so that His disciples would believe in Him. Now that God had performed so many miracles among the Israelites, why did they still refuse to believe? They enjoyed the benefits of the miracles, yet still did not believe in God; they repeatedly received God’s grace, yet did not want God. The Israelites were truly disgraceful.

Verse 12: “I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”

Since the Israelites were so unworthy, God essentially said: I might as well strike them with pestilence, preventing them from inheriting the land of Canaan. God said to Moses: I will raise up your descendants into a great nation, cause your descendants to enter the promised land to replace the Israelites, and I will bless your descendants to be greater and mightier than they are. If Moses had been a selfish person, this would have been a tremendous opportunity. Since the Israelites were rebellious and disobedient, it would have seemed entirely natural for God to raise up Moses’ descendants.

In fact, this was not the first time God made such a proposition. In Exodus chapter 32, Moses went up the mountain to be with God for forty days and forty nights, while the Israelites below began worshiping the golden calf. God said in Exodus 32:9–10, “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.’” Hearing God speak in this way, Moses immediately interceded on behalf of the Israelites according to God’s righteous and merciful character, and God answered Moses’ intercession, relenting from destroying the Israelites.

Who would have thought that the Israelites would still show no repentance, allowing the evil of unbelief to fester and provoking God to great wrath once again? God spoke to Moses a second time, proposing to raise up Moses' descendants to replace the Israelites. If you were Moses, what would you do? Having just been attacked with complaints by the Israelites to the point where he had to fall on his face, wouldn't he applaud now that God was vindicating him? But Moses proved himself to be a truly faithful servant of God; he considered only God's interests, thought on God's behalf, and prioritized God's glory.

Verse 13: "And Moses said to the Lord: 'Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them;'"

Moses first reminded the Lord God: How will the Egyptians see this? It was truly not easy for the Israelites to leave Egypt; God had to send ten plagues before Pharaoh's hardened heart relented to release the Israelites. It was by God's great power that He delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, which was a magnificent display of God's deeds before the Egyptians. If He were to strike down the Israelites now, how would the Egyptians view it? Next, Moses reminded God: How will the inhabitants of the land of Canaan perceive this?

Verse 14: "'and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Lord, are among this people; that You, Lord, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.'"

The Egyptians would report what they saw to the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. The inhabitants of Canaan had already heard that the Lord God dwelt among the people of Israel, and that throughout their wilderness journey, a pillar of cloud led them by day and a pillar of fire by night. The Lord God was seen leading the people of Israel forward; the Lord God set out together with the Israelites and encamped

together with them. The Lord God and the people of Israel were already a united testimony.

Verses 15–16: “Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard Your fame will speak, saying, ‘Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.’”

If God were now to kill the people of Israel because of their unbelief and rebellion, it would be no difficult task for Him—it would be as effortless as killing a single man. However, what would the Gentiles who have heard the fame of the Lord think? They would surely say that the Lord was unable to bring the people of Israel into the land of Canaan. This was the land that the Lord swore to give to Israel’s ancestors; now, because the Lord could not fulfill His promise, He killed them in the wilderness. If so, would not the Lord’s reputation suffer great harm among the nations? Moses was reminding the Lord God here not to strike down the Israelites, lest the Lord’s reputation be damaged and His glory fail to be proclaimed among the nations.

Here we see that the realm of Moses’ intercession for Israel was exceedingly high. He did not plead from a mere human standpoint asking God to pity Israel; rather, standing in the position of God’s friend, he asked God to consider His own reputation and glory so that it would not suffer loss through striking down the Israelites. Only one who truly understands God’s heart and walks in close intimacy with God would dare—and be worthy—to make such an intercession.

Verses 17–18: “And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.’”

Moses appealed first to God's name and glory; second, Moses appealed to God's faithfulness, because God never goes against what He has spoken. Moses pleaded with the Lord to let His power be great, fulfilling what He had spoken upon the Israelites. Why would God keeping His word require a great manifestation of power? Because Moses knew that the Israelites had committed a grave sin, falling short of God's righteous and holy attributes. God had to manifest His attribute of love in great power to uphold the merciful words He had spoken in love toward the people of Israel: that the Lord is slow to anger.

Please take note, saints: God is not incapable of anger; rather, He is slow to anger. According to the original text, it means slow to wrath. When the Israelites offended God's righteousness and holiness, God, in His longsuffering patience, temporarily restrained His wrath and did not bring immediate retribution upon the Israelites. Not only is He slow to anger, but He is also abundant in mercy, able to forgive iniquity and transgression.

Iniquity is the action arising from a person's sinful heart—the very act of sinning. Transgression originally means crossing over a boundary, referring to sinful conduct that the law defines as overstepping. In other words, one has not only sinned, but the sin can also be formally recorded on the ledger. In God's abundant mercy, both iniquity and transgression can be forgiven.

Naturally, God must still uphold His righteous and holy nature. Therefore, God provided the ordinances of the sin offering and trespass offering, so that through the offering of animal sacrifices, man's iniquity and transgression could be temporarily covered by the blood of the sacrifices, allowing God to temporarily turn His eyes away. Of course, Old Testament sacrifices were merely a shadow and a type of Jesus Christ. When God forgave man's iniquity and transgression, it pointed to the fullness of time, when God sent His only begotten Son to become the true sacrificial Lamb, thoroughly and once for all resolving the ransom for sin.

Regarding the consequences brought by sin: God by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. This statement added by Moses is not easy to understand. The previous sentence

had just stated that in God's mercy He forgives man's iniquity and transgression, yet the very next sentence states that He will visit man's sin to the third and fourth generation. The two sentences seem somewhat contradictory. Let us try to enter into Moses' train of thought to understand what he truly meant.

The principle of visiting sin to the third and fourth generation first appeared when God gave the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20:4–6, the second commandment is: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image," because God is a jealous God, and idolatry is the most offensive sin against God. When a person worships idols and raises his descendants in such an environment, it is difficult for them not to be influenced, thus causing the harm to extend to the third and fourth generations. Therefore, God visits the sin of idolatry to the third and fourth generation.

Why did Moses bring up the sin of idolatry? It seems Moses was reminding God that in the incident of the golden calf at Mount Sinai, although the Levites were raised up to kill the three thousand unrepentant people, God still forgave the entire congregation of Israel. Since God could forgive even in the case of this grave sin that warranted retribution to the third and fourth generation, could He not now—being slow to anger and abundant in mercy—forgive the sin of Israel's rebellion once again?

Verse 19: "Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

In this verse, Moses directly petitioned God. From the Exodus until now, how many times had the people of Israel offended God? Yet God has always had great mercy and has continually forgiven the Israelites. Although they committed a grave sin of unbelief and rebellion this time, Moses asked God to forgive the people of Israel once more according to His great lovingkindness. Moses was truly a good servant who was faithful in all God's house. He appealed to God's glory, God's faithfulness, and finally to God's mercy and lovingkindness, pleading with God to forgive the Israelites. All the saints serving in the church today should take Moses as an example and intercede for the church.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for placing the example of Moses before us. He was faithful in all the house of Israel, always seeking the welfare of the Israelites. Even when the Israelites complained against him and rebelled against his authority, he still faithfully interceded with God on their behalf; and he pleaded for God to consider His glory, His faithfulness, and His mercy. Moses' prayer for the Israelites is a timely reminder to us who serve in the church that we must also pray regularly for those whom we serve. May God help us. In the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.