

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

Numbers 14: 20-25

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 14. Today we will read from verse 20 to verse 25.

When the entire congregation of Israel rebelled against God and wanted to appoint another leader to take them back to Egypt, Joshua and Caleb stood up courageously. In faith, they declared that the land of Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey, and that the inhabitants of Canaan would become their food, because God was with them. However, the congregation of Israel would not listen to Joshua and Caleb at all. They were about to stone the two of them to death when the glory of the LORD appeared in the Tabernacle, stopping the Israelites from carrying out their plan.

After God's glory appeared, He did not address the Israelites. Instead, He spoke directly with Moses. From verses 11 through 25, this conversation is recorded in detail. In verses 11–12, God spoke to Moses, saying that He would strike down the Israelites who had despised Him with a plague and would raise up descendants from Moses to replace the people of Israel. From verses 13–19, Moses spoke to God. Moses interceded for the Israelites and pleaded with God to forgive their iniquity based on three things: God's glory, God's faithfulness, and God's mercy. In the midst of his prayer, Moses also specifically mentioned that God does not clear the guilty but visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations. This statement seems inconsistent with Moses' appeal for God to forgive the people. So why did Moses bring this up?

The reason may be connected to the incident of the golden calf at Mount Sinai. At that time, God was also exceedingly angry with the Israelites and intended to destroy them and raise up descendants from Moses to replace them. The sin Israel committed then was a violation of the Second Commandment—making a carved

image for themselves and worshiping an idol. This was an extremely serious offense against God.

In the Second Commandment, God specifically stated that He would visit the iniquity of those who worship idols to the third and fourth generations. Yet in that incident, because of Moses' intercession, God forgave the Israelites' sin. Although their sin was forgiven, they could not escape the consequences of their sin. God's discipline was that the Israelites lost the privilege of directly serving God, and the Levites were raised up to take their place in that service. By mentioning this incident, Moses seems to have been reminding God: Could You deal with this situation in the same way You dealt with the golden calf incident? Could You forgive the people without visiting their iniquity upon three or four generations?

From verses 20 through 25—which are the verses we are going to read today—we see God's direct response to Moses' intercession for the Israelites.

Verse 20: “Then the Lord said: “I have pardoned, according to your word.”

Moses' intercession was very effective, and God therefore decided to forgive the Israelites according to Moses' prayer. In other words, God would not raise up descendants from Moses to replace the Israelites. He would not destroy the Israelites, nor would He visit their iniquity upon them to the third and fourth generations. However, this does not mean that those who despised God would not receive punishment. When God forgave their sin, it meant that this particular case of sin would no longer be remembered by God. God had wiped the record of that sin away and would no longer hold it against them. Nevertheless, they would still suffer loss during the days they lived on the earth.

Dear brothers and sisters, our vision is often too short-sighted. We pay attention only to how our lives are going today while we are on the earth. We need to realize that God is eternal, and His promises are also eternal. If the record of our sin is not removed, we will lose eternal blessings. This is far more important than how well or how poorly we live in this present life. In Luke 16:19–31, Jesus told the story of

the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man lived very well during his lifetime, but after he died, he suffered in Hades. Lazarus, on the other hand, was a beggar during his lifetime, but after he died, he was carried to Abraham's bosom. After the rich man arrived in Hades, he regretted his situation, but it was already too late. God removed the record of the Israelites' sin. This concerns their eternal blessing. However, during the days they lived on the earth, they still had to suffer punishment.

Verse 21: "but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."

The translation in the Chinese Union Version is not very accurate in this verse. The Chinese Union Version translates the word as "swear," but this word does not actually exist in the Hebrew text. Therefore, a more accurate translation of this verse would be: "As I live forever, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD."

Why does God specifically mention His glory here? Because people cannot see God. But when God manifests His glory, people can see the glory of God. God Himself is originally outside of time. Yet whenever the eternal God enters into time, from the human perspective, this is a miracle. And this miracle is intended to manifest the glory of God.

Verse 22: "because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice."

Ever since God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt, God first performed ten miracles in Egypt through Moses. Only then was Pharaoh's grip loosened, allowing the Israelites to leave Egypt. The Israelites saw these miracles, which means that they saw the glory of God. After leaving Egypt and entering the wilderness, God performed many more miracles, such as parting

the Red Sea, sending manna down from heaven, and bringing living water out of the rock. Every one of these miracles was a manifestation of God's glory.

The Israelites saw the glory of God through these miracles, yet they still would not listen to God's word, and they tested God ten times. What God meant was that the Israelites had experienced so many miracles and had seen so much of His glory, yet they still did not believe. They even tested God many times. If we were to count them carefully, there may have been more than ten times. But since the Scripture here says, "you have tested Me now these ten times," which ten times were they?

Bible commentators have different ways of counting these ten occasions. The most common explanation is the list given in the Praying Bible:

The first time was in Exodus 14:11–12. At the Red Sea, when the Egyptian army was pursuing them, the Israelites complained to Moses. The second time was in Exodus 15:23–24. At Marah, because the water was bitter, the Israelites complained to Moses. The third time was in Exodus 16:2–3. In the Wilderness of Sin, because they had no food to eat, the Israelites complained to Moses.

The fourth and fifth times were in Exodus 16:20 and 27. On these two occasions, the Israelites disobeyed Moses' instructions concerning the gathering of manna. The sixth time was in Exodus 17:1–3. At Rephidim, because there was no water to drink, the Israelites quarreled with Moses. So God commanded Moses to strike the rock, and water flowed out of it.

The seventh time was in Exodus 32:7–8. At the foot of Mount Sinai, the Israelites made a golden calf and worshiped it. The eighth time was in Numbers 11:1–3. At Taberah, the Israelites complained, and the fire of the LORD burned among them. The ninth time was in Numbers 11:4–6. At Kibroth Hattaavah, the mixed multitude became filled with craving, which caused the Israelites to wail and complain.

The tenth time was in Numbers 14:1–6. At Kadesh, because the spies brought back an evil report, the Israelites fell into unbelief. They collectively rebelled against God and wanted to appoint another leader to take them back to Egypt.

This method of counting, however, overlooks two instances of disobedience by the leaders. Furthermore, the incident at the Red Sea, when the Israelites were pursued by the Egyptian army, occurred before they entered the wilderness, so it probably should not be included.

Another way of counting the ten occasions is the one I prefer, because it is clearer and easier to understand. Six of them were related to water and food. I will simply list the Scripture references, which are generally similar to those mentioned earlier: Exodus 15:23–24; 16:2–3; 16:20; 16:27; 17:1–3; and Numbers 11:4–6. Another two occasions involved the disobedience of the leaders. In Leviticus 10:1–2, Nadab and Abihu were struck down because they offered profane fire before the LORD. In Numbers 12:1–2, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, and as a result, Miriam became leprous.

The final two were the two most serious occasions: the golden calf incident in Exodus 32:7–8, and the unbelief and rebellion at Kadesh in Numbers 14:1–6. These final two and most serious acts of testing changed the destiny of the Israelites. In the incident of the golden calf, the Israelites lost the privilege of directly serving God, and the Levites were raised up to take their place. In the unbelief and rebellion at Kadesh, an entire generation of Israelite men lost the privilege of entering the Promised Land.

Verse 23: “they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.”

These Israelites had seen the glory of God, yet they despised God and tested Him. Therefore, they would by no means see the good land of Canaan that God had promised to the forefathers of Israel. At first glance, God’s punishment may seem excessively severe. The very purpose of their exodus from Egypt was to enter the good land and possess it as their inheritance. Now they could not enter the good land, but would wander in the wilderness throughout the rest of their lives until they died. It seemed that they had lost all hope for the rest of their lives. From this

perspective, the punishment certainly appears severe. But if we look at it from another perspective, we will understand why God punished them in this way.

They had seen and experienced so many miracles, yet they still did not believe. This showed that they were willing only to receive grace, but could not develop faith through experiencing that grace. In the wilderness, they did not need to cultivate the land, yet manna came down from heaven every day. This was entirely by grace. But once they entered the good land, there would no longer be manna. They would have to cultivate the land by faith, wait by faith, and reap by faith. A person who can survive only by grace, but cannot labor in faith and wait for the harvest, is simply not qualified to enter the good land. Because once they entered the good land, they would not be able to survive there.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a serious reminder for us. When we are young in the Lord, God is full of grace and supplies every one of our needs. However, after experiencing grace, our faith should correspondingly increase, and our spiritual life should begin to grow. When we are first saved, we can only drink milk. Later, we should be able to eat solid food. Eventually, we should grow to the point where we not only eat solid food ourselves, but are also able to prepare spiritual food for other saints. This is also what Hebrews 6:1 encourages us to do, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection." If we repeatedly experience grace, yet our life does not grow, the outcome will be like what Hebrews 6:7–8 says, "For the earth which drinks in the rain that often falls on it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned."

The rain of grace is meant to help us produce useful plants. This is God's desire: to make us a supply to others. If we experience the rain of grace, yet can produce only thorns and briars, then what use would it be for us to enter the good land? We would simply not be qualified. Like those Israelites, all the work of our lifetime would then be burned up before the judgment seat of Christ. Although we ourselves would be saved, it would be as though we had passed through fire.

Verse 24: “But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.”

The Chinese Union Version translates this phrase as “another spirit of mind,” but the Hebrew word translated as “mind” is ruach. This word is normally translated as “spirit,” and the KJV also translates it as “spirit.” Therefore, this sentence should be understood more accurately as: “But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed Me wholeheartedly.” We know that in the Old Testament, the Israelites did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this “spirit” refers to the human spirit. After Adam failed and fell in the Garden of Eden, the human spirit died. In other words, it was no longer functioning properly and was left with only some sense of conscience. When a person does something wrong, his conscience may feel uneasy, yet he has no power to govern himself and keep himself from doing wrong. Here, however, it says that Caleb had a different spirit.

The twelve spies whom Moses sent to spy out the good land are considered by many Bible commentators to have been among the seventy elders. In other words, they too had experienced the Holy Spirit being imparted to them from Moses. The Holy Spirit came upon a person like putting on an outer garment. This Holy Spirit could respond to the human spirit, like deep calling unto deep. After Caleb’s spirit was moved by the Holy Spirit, it was able to influence his soul, causing him to firmly resolve to follow God wholeheartedly. The other ten spies may also have experienced the moving of the Holy Spirit, but their spirit was unable to influence their soul and cause them, like Caleb, to firmly resolve to follow God wholeheartedly. Therefore, having an experience of being moved by the Holy Spirit does not guarantee that we will follow God wholeheartedly.

The moving of the Holy Spirit also comes from God’s grace. If this grace cannot help us grow in life or cause our faith to increase, then we have wasted God’s grace. Therefore, we should all take this as a warning. Because Caleb had a different spirit, he was able to firmly resolve to follow God. Therefore, God would lead him into the good land that he had once spied out. The other ten spies, although they had also been to the good land, would never be able to enter it.

God promised that Caleb's descendants would also inherit the land. Here, God was speaking prophetically. When the ten spies were so frightened by the descendants of Anak that they saw themselves as grasshoppers, Caleb said, "Do not be afraid of them; they are our bread." If we look ahead forty-five years, we find these words spoken by Caleb to Joshua in Joshua 14:7–12: "I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God.

So Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children's forever, because you have wholly followed the LORD my God.' And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said." We can see how bold and vigorous Caleb was at eighty-five years old. He indeed drove out the giants of the Anakim and received Hebron as an inheritance for his descendants.

Verse 25: "Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea."

Since the Israelites did not have the faith to enter the good land and possess it, God told them to turn back. They had already reached Kadesh Barnea, which was right at the entrance to the good land. In the hill country at the entrance to the good land lived the Amalekites and the Canaanites, who blocked the way into the good land. Now God told them to turn back, to follow the road toward the Red Sea, and

return to the wilderness. God did not strike them down with a plague; instead, He required them to return to the wilderness and wander there.

After the Israelites had been organized as an army by God in the wilderness of Sinai, they became a corporate body. Within this corporate body were a few people who had faith, such as Joshua and Caleb. They could have entered the good land directly. But because the majority of the Israelites did not have the faith to enter the good land, God determined that all the Israelites had to return to the wilderness and wander there. Whether they had faith or not, the entire corporate body had to wander in the wilderness until God's appointed time was fulfilled and those who lacked faith had fallen in the wilderness. Only then would God lead the Israelites into the good land.

Those who are able to enter the good land are people who have faith. What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith is to realize what we hope for according to God's word. Although we cannot see it with our physical eyes, we have full assurance in our hearts, because God's word itself is the evidence that we will receive what He has promised. May God help us all to grow and advance on the pathway of faith.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You for giving us this passage of Scripture. You have shown us that Caleb had a different spirit, and because of this, he was able to firmly resolve to follow You wholeheartedly, and You gave him the good land as his inheritance. Help us, Lord, so that we may also have this different spirit. May we not only be moved by the Holy Spirit, but also allow the Holy Spirit to influence our souls, so that we may make a firm decision in our souls to follow You wholeheartedly. Bless the church where I am. Raise up many brothers who are like Caleb, so that we may encourage one another and support one another. May all the saints in the church be able to fully taste and enjoy the riches of the good land. Bless the church where I am. I pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!