

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

Numbers 14: 26-35

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 read from verse 26 to verse 35.

Earlier we read that the congregation of Israel gathered together to rebel against God. Joshua and Caleb stood up and, in faith, urged the congregation of Israel. Yet the congregation of Israel actually wanted to stone the two of them to death, and the LORD God displayed His glory, stopping the Israelites' action. Verses 14:11–25 record the back-and-forth dialogue between God and Moses. This dialogue is very precious, and it truly fulfills what God testified concerning Moses in Numbers 12:8, "I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings." Although Moses was interceding on behalf of the Israelites, the dialogue doesn't look like a formal prayer at all—it is more like two old friends chatting.

It really is chatting, because what they chat about are the things of heaven, yet it determined the future of the people of Israel on earth. Since it was a chat, it went wherever their thoughts led. Moses urged God to consider God's glory, God's faithfulness, and God's mercy—these three are important attributes of God. God took it in, and according to Moses' request, He pardoned the iniquity of the Israelites. But the punishment for sin could not be waived. Those who despised God would not enter the good land of Canaan; only Caleb had a different spirit, such that he was able to follow the Lord wholeheartedly—he would certainly enter Canaan, and his descendants would surely inherit that land.

Because God and Moses had entered a "chat mode," the words were not so precise; they emphasized only the principles by which God would deal with the Israelites, not the details. Yet in the course of this chat, the manner and principles for dealing with the Israelites had already been determined.

Next, verses 26 to 35 are today's passage. These words are spoken by God to Moses and Aaron—this is formal, official speech. God intends, through Moses and Aaron, to clearly tell the people of Israel how He will deal with them, and this section of dialogue adds in many details.

Verses 26–27: "And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.'"

The LORD announced to Moses and Aaron His verdict concerning the congregation of Israel. This is the final ruling, with no room for bargaining. God defined the people of Israel as an evil congregation, because God had heard their complaints against Him. Although they had repeatedly experienced miracles and received much of God's grace, their faith had not increased and their life had not grown; whenever they met difficulty, they simply complained. God had borne with them many times, but this time they actually wanted to appoint another leader to take them back to Egypt, and to stone God's faithful servants to death. So this time God would bear with them no longer.

Verse 28: "Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you.'"

The Chinese Union Version translates this as "swear an oath," but that word doesn't appear in the original text. So it is that God wanted Moses and Aaron to tell the Israelites how God lives forever, and His word too shall be established forever. God's word is certain and unchanging. The complaining words of the Israelites reached God's ears, and God would deal with the Israelites according to the words He had heard. Human speech is inconsistent—part true, part false—often not meaning what it says and merely venting emotions. Yet these words all reflect the condition of a person's inner being.

Luke 6:45, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." So what a person says with his mouth reflects the condition of his heart. When the heart is full of something, the mouth will speak it out. God is omnipresent, and these words all entered God's ears, and God would treat the speakers according to what He had heard.

Dear brothers and sisters, we really must guard our mouths—not one inappropriate word should come out. Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." Because the congregation of Israel spoke without restraint, did not submit to the authority God had established, and complained against God, God repaid them according to the words they had spoken.

Verses 29–30: "The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in."

The words God speaks here are extremely precise in their wording. "The carcasses of you shall fall in this wilderness"—who is the "you" spoken of here? God Himself gives the definition: those who were numbered, from twenty years old and above, who complained against God. God's definition is so clear; what God is speaking of is the males of the twelve tribes of Israel who were numbered in Numbers chapter 1, all of them twenty years old and above, totaling 603,550. Note that God's definition does not include the women and children, nor does it include the Levites, because the Levites were not numbered and were not organized into the army. Among these 603,550, all who complained against God would not enter the good land of Canaan that God promised.

Then God says that only Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun can enter. Beforehand, God very clearly defined who would fall dead in the wilderness

and could not enter the good land; afterward, He cited Caleb and Joshua as examples of those who could enter the good land. Since they are examples, it isn't that only these two men could enter the good land. Eleazar the priest, who was of comparable age to Joshua and Caleb, was a Levite, and he also entered the good land.

Numbers 20:28, "Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain." In this verse we see that Eleazar succeeded Aaron as the high priest of the Israelites. Joshua 14:1, "These are the areas which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel distributed as an inheritance to them." Here we see that after Eleazar entered the good land, he still fulfilled the office of high priest, serving the Israelites together with Joshua.

God cited Caleb and Joshua as positive examples precisely in order to tell the Israelites that only those who have faith and are able to follow God will surely be able to enter the good land of Canaan that God promised.

Verse 31: "But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised."

Moreover, their women and children—the very ones they had said would be carried off as plunder by the inhabitants of Canaan—God would bring into the land of Canaan. Those they thought were weak and unable to protect themselves, God would protect; God would lead them into the good land and cause them to inherit that land. They can go in, but you cannot; the weak can go in, but the strong cannot. This shows that entering the good land does not depend on human ability, but is according to God's promise. Originally God promised that all the Israelites would be able to enter the good land and possess it as an inheritance, but now you cannot enter, and the main reason is that you have despised that land.

Here we should pause a moment and think carefully. These unbelieving Israelites knew that Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey, a good land suitable for people to live in. So why does God say they despised that land? It turns out that God's standard of judgment is not whether they knew—merely knowing is of no use. Faith must be added to it, going up to take possession of the land; only that counts. When the Israelites did not dare to go up and take the land as an inheritance because the inhabitants of Canaan were strong, God judged that they had despised that land.

So true spiritual gain is not only knowledge—one must also experience it and enjoy it in faith; only then is it truly gained. If we do not go through this process, God's judgment is that we have despised it. To give an example: every Christian knows that God's word is our spiritual food, and that we must read the Bible daily, just as the Israelites had to gather manna every day in the wilderness. We know God's word is precious, but merely knowing is of no use. If we have not established the habit of daily Bible reading, and have not eaten God's word as food, so that it becomes our experience, becomes our enjoyment, and finally becomes our constitution—then God will judge that we have despised God's word. This is an extremely serious matter.

Verses 32–33: "But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness."

Since you have despised that land, you shall not enter that land. Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness—this is the second time God says that this generation of unbelieving Israelites must die in the wilderness. Not only would they be punished, but their sons and daughters would also wander in the wilderness for forty years, bearing the brunt of their infidelity.

The parents sinned, and the children were implicated as well. God set a time limit of forty years: the first generation of unbelieving Israelites would all die in the wilderness, and their children would accordingly wander in the wilderness for forty

years, until their carcasses were consumed in the wilderness—that is to say, until not even their bones remained. The price of one person's unbelief is to wander aimlessly in the wilderness for forty years. This is a complete period of testing, lasting until all the unbelieving had fallen dead in the wilderness, their bones decayed, existing no longer.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a very serious warning, and we all need to examine our faith carefully. After believing in Jesus Christ, we receive many wonderful promises. For example: through confessing our sins, our transgressions can be forgiven; through prayer, we can enjoy sweet fellowship with God; through reading the Bible, our spiritual life can grow; through obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit, our days can be filled with peace and joy; through serving in the church, we can be built together with the saints and become a testimony of Christ. Do you really believe these wonderful promises? Have you experienced them? Have you truly gained them?

I think most saints have some experience and gain, but none of it is complete. Therefore we should all come humbly before the Lord—on the one hand thanking the Lord for the experiences we have already gained, and on the other hand honestly telling the Lord that we really are willing to believe, but there are still some things we cannot bring ourselves to believe, and asking the Lord to help. If we can come before the Lord with a humble heart, the Lord will surely add faith to us according to our need, so that we will not wander aimlessly in the wilderness and finally fall dead there.

As for the new generation of Israelites, they had to bear the bitter consequences of the previous generation's unbelief, and they too had to wander in the wilderness for forty years. As for the word "wander," the NIV translates it as "shepherd," expressing that the next generation would shepherd flocks in the wilderness for forty years. The previous generation grew up in Egypt, accustomed to the world's enjoyments and temptations, so that their faith was not firm. But the next generation of Israelites grew up in the wilderness—on the one hand they shepherded flocks themselves, and on the other hand they also received God's

shepherding. Although they bore the consequences of the previous generation's iniquity, they also laid a wonderful foundation in faith.

Speaking typologically, the next generation of Israelites is our new man, and the previous generation of Israelites is our old man. Only when the old man falls dead in the wilderness can the new man, in faith, enter the good land and possess it as an inheritance. This is exactly what Paul says in Colossians 3:9–10, "You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." We must all learn to put off the old man and put on the new man, so that we can testify for Christ together with all the saints in the church.

Verse 34: "According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection."

So the forty years correspond to the forty days in which the twelve spies searched out the good land—one year for each day. The Israelites would bear their guilt for forty years, and these forty years are counted from the day the Israelites came out of Egypt. Forty is a number of testing. The twelve spies searched out the good land for forty days, saw the giants of the Anakim, and felt they could not overcome them. Their unbelief caused the Israelites to spend forty years bearing the consequences of their guilt. Unbelieving people often have to face far greater and more difficult consequences, and the ratio God uses is one day for one year.

Dear brothers and sisters, are you facing some difficult circumstance right now that you feel you cannot overcome? You must learn to bring this difficulty before God, ask God to add to your faith, and to help you commit this difficulty entirely into God's hands, and then, with simple faith, watch how God accomplishes it. Don't come with fixed ideas and expectations, demanding that God accomplish things according to your ideas and expectations. That is not committing—that is instructing God how He ought to act. Are you God? True commitment is handing sovereignty over to God, using the very difficulty in front of you to learn, in faith,

to watch how God accomplishes it. If you are willing to commit in this way, you will see God defeat the giants for you; God will also bring you into the good land, to enjoy the riches He has promised and to possess that land as an inheritance. Whatever you do, don't run away—face the difficulty head-on. If you run away, you will face greater difficulty, and you will spend a longer time experiencing God's rejection. And with this ratio of one day for one year, that is truly a losing proposition.

Verse 35: "I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."

This is God's conclusion. God will by no means clear the guilty. This congregation gathered together to oppose God is an evil congregation; they shall be consumed in the wilderness, they shall die in the wilderness. Within these brief 10 verses, this is the third time God says that this congregation, who are unbelieving and who oppose God, must die in the wilderness.

I hope we can all receive God's reminder. The writer of Hebrews cites the example of the Israelites, because on account of their unbelief they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, finally all falling dead in the wilderness, unable to enter the good land and enjoy rest. Hebrews 3:12–14 exhorts us, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. The Israelites fell dead in the wilderness because of unbelief—this is truly a very serious reminder to us. We ask the Lord to be gracious to us, that we may bring every circumstance we face before God and truly commit it into God's gracious hand. We also confess that there are many places where we cannot bring ourselves to believe. Lord, our unbelief—please help us, and let us truly learn to be people who commit and look to God. May the Lord

Himself come and lead the road ahead of me, help me to always hold a simple faith, and in faith look to God's grace, and in grace enjoy all of God's provision; may my days be filled with peace and joy. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.