

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

Numbers 15: 17-26

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 15. Today we will read from verse 17 to verse 26.

After the Israelites' failure at Kadesh, they began to wander in the wilderness for 38 years. It was only after the first generation of Israelites had all died in the wilderness that God led the new generation of Israelites into the land of Canaan to possess it as their inheritance. During their wandering, God further revealed through Moses the details concerning the offerings, as regulations that they would need to observe after entering the good land.

God first revealed that when offering a fire offering, they had to offer a grain offering and a drink offering corresponding to the size of the sacrificial animal. God then revealed that the foreigner who dwelt among them could also offer a sweet aroma, a fire offering, and was to observe the same regulations as the Israelites. For before God, there was no distinction: as the Israelites were, so was the stranger who dwelt among them. The book of Leviticus records the regulations concerning the offerings that God revealed to the first generation of Israelites. After the Israelites' failure at Kadesh, God supplemented the new generation of Israelites with some additional details concerning the offerings. These details may have been precisely what was lacking in the first generation of Israelites and may have contributed to their failure. God's purpose was to help the new generation of Israelites, after entering the Promised Land, to keep His covenant and live a life that was pleasing to Him.

Verse 17-18: "Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land to which I bring you."

God continued to speak to the Israelites through Moses: “When you have come into the land where I am bringing you.” God’s speaking always carries a promise with it, so that the Israelites who were wandering in the wilderness would know that God would surely lead them into the promised land. Their wandering was God’s discipline. The positive purpose of His discipline was to lead them into the good land. This enabled them to continue to have hope during the days of their wandering.

Verse 19: “then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a wave offering to the Lord.”

During their days in the wilderness, the Israelites neither cultivated the land nor harvested crops. Manna came down from heaven every day to sustain them. Their survival depended entirely on God’s grace. Yet the Israelites did not know how to be thankful, and this eventually led to their failure at Kadesh. After entering the promised land, they would begin to cultivate the land and also begin to harvest. Therefore, God specifically reminded them that when they ate the food of the good land, they were to offer a wave offering to the LORD. A wave offering was an offering that was taken in the hands and moved up and down.

From the perspective of typology, Jesus Christ is the firstfruits, and the movement up and down of the offering typifies Christ’s resurrection and ascension. When God required the Israelites to offer a wave offering to Him as they ate the food of the good land, He was telling them not to forget God’s grace. Especially when they began to cultivate the land and labor, it would be easier for them to forget God’s grace and think that they had obtained the harvest through their own efforts. Yet they would forget that the land had been promised to them by God, that the sunlight and rain were gifts from God, and even that their days of life were given to them by God. If God were simply to withdraw His hand, all their efforts would come to nothing. Therefore, when the Israelites ate the food of the good land, God wanted them to give thanks to Him and offer a wave offering to Him.

This is very much like the saints in the New Testament praying before a meal and giving thanks for the food. In doing so, we acknowledge: If the ascended Christ were not governing all things, how could we live each day in peace? How could our labor produce a harvest? Therefore, giving thanks for our food declares that even the breath of our existence depends on God. Such an acknowledgment helps us continually look to God in our daily lives and know that everything we possess is a gift from God. Even the temptations and difficulties we encounter should, because we look to God, become our food. They can help increase our faith and help our life grow.

Verse 20: “You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up.”

After the Israelites entered the good land and began to cultivate it, the first harvest of the crops each year came around the time of the Feast of Passover. Therefore, God said in Leviticus 23:10–11, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.’”

The Israelites were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of their harvest to the priest, and the priest was to wave it before God and offer it to Him on the day after the first Sabbath following Passover. From the perspective of New Testament typology, Christ suffered at Passover and was resurrected on the day after the Sabbath. Christ thus became the firstfruits offered to God. Therefore, the Feast of Firstfruits is a type of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Leviticus establishes the regulations concerning the feasts of the Israelites. Once a year, on the Feast of Firstfruits, they were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of their harvest to the priest, and the priest would offer it to God as a sacrifice. Here in Numbers 15, the offering at the Feast of Firstfruits is further applied to every household in Israel. God’s intention is very clear: offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving

and worship to God once a year through the priest at the Feast of Firstfruits seemed to be insufficient.

The Israelites needed to participate more fully in order to truly understand grace and learn to have a thankful heart toward God. Therefore, God said that when the Israelites entered the good land and ate the food of the good land, they were to offer a wave offering to God. It was not a matter of asking the priest to make an offering once a year. Rather, every household, whenever it had a harvest in the good land and ate the food produced by the good land, was to offer a wave offering. How was this offering to be made? The Chinese Union Version translation is not very precise here. The KJV translates it as “the first of your dough”—the first lump of new dough.

If we compare this with the offering at the Feast of Firstfruits, the firstfruits of the wheat would be gathered by collecting the heads of grain, removing the husks on the threshing floor, and then grinding the wheat into fine flour. Water would then be added and the flour kneaded into dough. This would be the first lump of dough each year. Of course, God’s intention was not merely for the Israelites to offer a sacrifice to Him once a year at the Feast of Firstfruits. God desired even more that the Israelites would continually give thanks to Him and offer sacrifices to Him through their thanksgiving. Therefore, the Jewish people developed this practice so that every time they kneaded a new batch of dough, they would take out the best portion and offer it to God. The word “first” can be translated as the first one, but it can also refer to that which is the best. This became what the Jewish people called the dough offering. Whenever each household kneaded a new batch of dough, they would take out a portion and offer it to God.

After the wave offering was made, it belonged to the priests and the Levites, because they had no inheritance of land. The Israelites were to take care of their needs for daily living. In this passage, however, the emphasis is not on the dough offering itself, but on making this dough into bread and then offering the bread to God as a wave offering. This was the wave offering presented to God from the produce of their threshing floor.

God required the Israelites to take the wheat from their threshing floor, process it through all these stages, and make it into bread before first offering a wave offering to God. There are two particularly significant meanings here. First, before the Israelites enjoyed their food, they were to give thanks to God and offer a wave offering to Him. Only afterward could each household enjoy the food that God had given them. Second, this was to teach the Israelites not to depend on their own efforts. Of course, the Israelites needed to labor in cultivating and harvesting the land. They also had to process the grain—removing the husks, grinding it into fine flour, kneading it into dough, and then baking it into bread. All of these laborious processes were necessary. However, without God's grace, all their labor would be in vain. Offering the bread as a wave offering was meant to remind the Israelites that they must not rely on themselves.

Verse 21: “Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.”

In this verse, the grinding of the firstfruits of the wheat into flour, according to the original text, refers to the first portion or the best portion of the new dough. It was to be offered to God as a wave offering. This was a regulation that the Israelites were to observe throughout their generations. Paul refers to this verse in Romans 11:16, “For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy.”

As the Israelites enjoyed the produce of the good land, they were to take the first portion of the new dough and offer it to God as a wave offering. Once this portion of dough became holy, the whole lump was also considered holy. Actually, this is also what the New Testament saints practice when they pray and give thanks before a meal. We offer the food to God, and God makes the food holy; therefore, all the food becomes holy as well.

After dealing with the wave offering of the new dough, God instructed Moses how to deal with situations in which the corporate body sinned without knowing it. The background of this matter was still the failure at Kadesh, when the Israelites

collectively rebelled against God. Of course, those who took the lead had a heart of unbelief. They were immediately judged by God and died by the plague.

Most of the Israelites, however, were led by others and committed the sin without realizing it. Therefore, God revealed how they were to offer sacrifices in order to make atonement for their sin.

Verse 22-23: “If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moses— all that the Lord has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and onward throughout your generations.”

The commandments, statutes, and judgments that God gave to the Israelites through Moses were all regulations that the Israelites were to observe throughout their generations. When the Israelites failed to keep all these commandments, they committed wrongdoing. In the Old Testament, they had to seek God’s forgiveness through offering sacrifices. The sacrifices they offered were precisely a type of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the saints in the New Testament must receive God’s forgiveness through the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross. The various details of the sacrifices typify the various effects and accomplishments of what Christ completed for us on the cross.

Verse 24: “then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma to the Lord, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one kid of the goats as a sin offering.”

If the sin that was committed was something the Israelites did not know about, the Chinese often say, “Those who do not know are not guilty.” But this saying does not work before God. Even if you did not know, you still did it; and once it is done,

it can cause harm. When there is harm, compensation is required. When the Israelites committed a sin that they did not know about, they were to offer a young bull as a burnt offering. At the same time, they were also to offer the corresponding grain offering, namely, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of olive oil, as well as the corresponding drink offering, which was half a hin of wine. The burnt offering and the grain offering were to be burned together on the altar, and then the drink offering was to be poured out. This was to become a sweet-smelling offering made by fire to God, pleasing to Him.

In addition, they were to offer one male goat as a sin offering. Actually, when the whole congregation of Israel committed a sin unintentionally, this matter had already been addressed in Leviticus 4:13–14, “Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the matter is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done something against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which should not be done, and they become guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a young bull for the sin, and bring it before the tabernacle of meeting.” Here, the matter being dealt with is that the Israelites did something that they were not permitted to do and committed the sin unintentionally. At the time, no one recognized it, but later, when they became aware of it, they were to offer a young bull as a sin offering.

These two passages deal with unintentional sin in the same way. Why, then, are the methods of offering different? Most Bible commentators agree that in Leviticus 4:13–14, they had done something that the Law said must not be done. This is the sin of commission—the sin of doing something wrong. They did not know about it at the time, but after they became aware of it, the high priest determined that it was not a deliberate sin. Therefore, they were to offer a young bull as a sin offering. The young bull was the largest sacrificial animal, and this offering was to make atonement for the entire congregation of Israel.

However, in Numbers 15:24, God had commanded the Israelites to do something, but they failed to do it. This is the sin of omission—the sin of neglect or failure to do what should have been done. Why did this omission occur? The first reason is that they had not fully consecrated themselves. As a result, they did not understand

God's will or what God wanted the Israelites to do. Saints, please pay attention: the background here is still God's desire for them to enter the good land and possess it as their inheritance. Yet they did not have the faith to go up and possess the land. Therefore, the high priest was to offer the greatest burnt offering on behalf of the Israelites—a young bull—together with the corresponding grain offering and drink offering, so that the offering made by fire would be acceptable to God. In typology, this signifies offering themselves to God once again. Although it was not a deliberate sin, it was still sin. Therefore, they also had to offer a male goat as a sin offering, asking God to forgive their sin.

Verse 25: “So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord, for their unintended sin.”

The entire congregation of Israel was to bring the burnt offering, grain offering, drink offering, and sin offering before the priest and acknowledge their wrongdoing. The priest would then offer the sacrifices on behalf of the Israelites before God. He would burn the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar, together with the drink offering, as a sweet-smelling offering made by fire, acceptable and pleasing to God. Then he would offer the sin offering on behalf of the Israelites, asking God to forgive their wrongdoing.

Verse 26: “It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who dwells among them, because all the people did it unintentionally.”

The entire congregation of Israel, as well as the foreigners who dwelt among them, would all receive forgiveness. This verse specifically adds the foreigners who dwelt among them, showing that God's salvation was originally intended for all people, without distinction between Israelites and Gentiles. Of course, there is a distinction

in the order in which salvation is carried out: first to the Israelites, and afterward to the Gentiles. However, even in the Old Testament age, those Gentiles who sought God and were willing to dwell among the Israelites were treated by God no differently from the Israelites: they offered sacrifices according to the same regulations, and their sins were forgiven according to the same regulations.

This was very unusual at that time. Almost every civilization distinguished between its own citizens and foreigners. In matters of the law, the distribution of resources, and the exercise of power, foreigners were always considered inferior to the people of their own nation. Yet the law that God gave through Moses clearly stated that there was no distinction between the Israelites and the foreigners who dwelt among them.

The Israelites offended God because they were unwilling to enter the good land. God judged their unintentional sin, but through the sacrifices offered by the priest, they could receive forgiveness, and God would no longer remember their sin. Actually, we are the same. There are many promises of God that we cannot receive because we lack faith. Therefore, like the Israelites, we need to offer the burnt offering, grain offering, and drink offering, offering ourselves wholly to God once again and asking Him to accept us. At the same time, we need to offer a sin offering for our unbelief and ask God to forgive us. In this way, we can look to God in faith and move forward step by step toward the good land, receiving all the riches that God has promised.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. Through the passages in the Book of Numbers, You remind us once again that our daily food and sustenance are all given by You. We should continually receive Your grace with a thankful heart. It is not our labor or our efforts. These things are necessary, but most fundamentally, our days are all in Your hands. Only when we do all things with a thankful heart can we look to You and, in faith, receive the abundant riches that You have promised.

Sometimes, because of our unbelief, we are unable to receive Your promises. Therefore, we need to offer ourselves completely to You once again and ask You to accept us. We also need to confess our unbelief before You and ask You to increase

our faith. Only in faith can we receive God's promises. May You help us all to be satisfied early with the lovingkindness of the Lord and to enjoy the Lord's abundant provision. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!