

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

Numbers 15: 27-36

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 15. Today, we are reading verses 27 through 36.

Yesterday we read of God's charge to Moses concerning how to deal with sins committed unintentionally by the congregation of Israel, especially those things which God said should be done but which the congregation of Israel did not do. They were to offer a young bull as a burnt offering, and also to add the corresponding grain offering and drink offering, and afterward they were also to offer a male goat as a sin offering, and God would forgive their sin — this includes the Israelites as well as the strangers who dwelt among them.

After dealing with sins committed corporately, God then charged how sins committed by an individual should be handled. The manner of handling is not based on the act of sin, but on the person's inward heart, and it can be divided into two major categories:

The first category is sin committed unintentionally; it may be out of ignorance, it may be out of negligence, or it may be out of weakness. As for this sin committed unintentionally, if it infringes upon the rights and interests of another person, then according to the principle of the trespass offering, recorded in Leviticus 6:1-7, he must make corresponding restitution; God does not repeat this part again. This sin committed unintentionally also offends God, and from verses 27-29, God charges Moses how the sin offering is to be presented, asking God to forgive. The second category is sin committed presumptuously; such a person despises God's authority and acts with brazen audacity, and God charges Moses with a different manner of handling it. Let us first look at sin committed unintentionally.

Verse 27: "And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering."

If someone, through an unintentional fault, commits a sin and offends God, he is to offer a female goat kid in its first year as a sin offering. In Leviticus 4:27-28, "If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed."

In the passage in Leviticus it is specifically pointed out that it is doing something which the LORD commanded not to be done, and then he is to offer a female goat as a sin offering. The passage in Numbers is broader, including doing what should not be done, and also including what should have been done but was not done. If he did not commit it presumptuously, he is to offer a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. In these two passages the sacrificial animal is the same; only in the passage in Numbers is the age of one year added, so the passage in Numbers can be regarded as a supplement to the passage in Leviticus.

Verse 28: "So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the LORD, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him."

The person who has sinned unintentionally, knowing that he has sinned, is to bring a female goat in its first year to the priest, and the priest is to present the sin offering before God to make atonement for him. As for the details of the offering, they are in Leviticus 4:29-31; may the saints review the daily Bible reading in Leviticus, and I will not repeat them here.

After the priest presents the sin offering for him, it shall be forgiven him. Thanks be to the Lord, God's promise is very certain — it shall be forgiven him; the sin he committed unintentionally has already been completely blotted out by God and is

remembered no more. The reason God can completely forgive the sin a person commits unintentionally, and yet not violate His attribute of righteousness, is that God in eternity had already established the plan of redemption, to send His only begotten beloved Son to bear all the sins that man commits. The sins committed by the Israelites in the Old Testament were first recorded on the account, and when Christ completed redemption, they were wiped out entirely.

Verse 29: "You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them."

This is a very special aspect of Numbers. What Numbers records is the corporate action of the Israelites; since it is corporate, it cannot but mention the strangers who dwell among them. God's charge is also very clear: whether an Israelite or a sojourning stranger, if he does anything unintentionally and commits an unintentional trespass, the same law is to be used; he is to ask the priest to offer for him a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. This female goat is a type of Christ, and God will forgive his sin and remember it no more. Next, verses 30-31 record the one who sins presumptuously.

Verse 30: "But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people."

"Presumptuously" — the original meaning of this word in Hebrew is "raised hand," that is, to lift up the hand. This is a very vivid word, expressing that at the same time as he does the deed, he lifts up his hand to challenge God. This behavior does not come out of ignorance, negligence, or weakness, but is a deliberate resistance against God, a refusal to submit to God's ordination, and an open challenge to God. Such a person brings reproach on the LORD, and the LORD's punishment is extremely severe: he is to be cut off from among his people.

The Israelites are God's chosen people in the Old Testament; God made a covenant with the forefathers of the Israelites and promised them every kind of blessing. When a person is cut off from among the people of Israel, it means he no longer has a part in God's covenant; he loses the right of lawful inheritance, he cannot enjoy the various blessings God gives to the Israelites, and he must lose fellowship with the Israelites — he is to be driven out of the communal society of Israel. On the spiritual level, the matter of the offerings has no part and no portion with him, and his sin cannot be forgiven.

The sin offering is for those who are humble and willing to repent; the sin offering is not a ticket to sin. When a person openly blasphemes God, he rejects grace, and he loses the right to offer sacrifices. The person who sins with a raised hand has a haughty mind and openly resists God, and he is to be cut off from among the people of Israel.

By the New Testament, Jesus defines even more definitely which kind of person's sin can never be forgiven. In Matthew 12:31-32, "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." Man's ability to be saved rests on the work of the Holy Spirit, causing a person to reproach himself for his own sin, and further to seek the salvation that comes from God. The person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is like a person sinning with both hands lifted up; the Holy Spirit cannot work upon him, and therefore he also cannot be forgiven.

Hebrews 10:26-29, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" When a person has heard the truth of the gospel and still sins willfully, he

is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, there is no longer a sacrifice for sins, and God will judge him according to his sin.

Verse 31: "Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him."

Despising God's word and breaking God's commandment — such a person is to be cut off from among the people of Israel, and his guilt is to be upon himself. In human society, a crime receives different punishment according to the degree of severity of the act; however, God does not only see a person's act — God gives even greater weight to a person's inward heart. The one who purposes in his heart to do evil, God will surely not tolerate; but as for errors committed out of ignorance, negligence, or weakness, a person can obtain forgiveness through presenting the sin offering. The passage that follows, from verse 32 to verse 36, gives a practical example, telling people how to deal with the one who sins with a raised hand.

Verses 32-33: "Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation."

The Israelites were to keep the Sabbath; this God told the Israelites very plainly, and more than once. In Exodus 20:8-10, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates." This is the fourth of the Ten Commandments, and it very clearly states that on this day, the Sabbath, no work whatever may be done.

In Exodus 31:14, "You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people." The punishment for profaning the Sabbath is also very clear: whoever does work on the Sabbath must be put to death and cut off from among his people. God very clearly ordained that the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath.

Therefore the Israelites in the wilderness, on the Sabbath day, all kept God's commandment, resting in the camp and remembering God. As a result, one man did not keep the Sabbath and was outside gathering sticks; the purpose of gathering sticks was for cooking food for daily living. In Exodus 35:2-3, "Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day."

Here God's word very clearly says that no fire may be kindled on the Sabbath. So this man knowingly violated it, and gathering sticks in the wilderness is not a hidden thing, but is in broad daylight, visible from far off; this constitutes his openly challenging God's commandment. The previous verse had just said that the one who despises God's word and breaks God's commandment shall surely be cut off; this man's behavior was precisely despising God's word, precisely breaking God's commandment. Several Israelites saw it and brought him to Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation of Israel also gathered there, to see how the leaders would handle it.

Verse 34: "They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him."

Whoever does work on the Sabbath must be put to death — this is God's command; but as to how it was to be carried out, God had not stated plainly. In addition, whether there were other hidden circumstances in his gathering sticks on the Sabbath, or whether there were some unavoidable difficulties, Moses and Aaron were also not certain, and so they temporarily put him under guard. Moses then

went before the LORD to inquire. Moses' attitude was very good: what he was not certain of, he did not carry out first, lest he overstep God's intention; he sought God's clearer revelation and leading.

Verse 35: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.'"

Here God once again confirmed His command: whoever does work on the Sabbath must surely be put to death. And God also very clearly instructed how it was to be carried out: this man was to be taken outside the camp. The tabernacle is God's dwelling place; when God was among the Israelites, the Israelites encamped around the tabernacle, and the whole camp, because of God's presence, became holy, and no defilement whatever was permitted. Therefore the one who sinned was to be taken outside the camp, and the whole congregation was to stone him to death outside the camp.

This is a public and severe punishment. Why must the whole congregation participate? Because when one person openly disobeys God's command, it stirs up God's anger, so that calamity reaches the whole congregation of Israel. They had just experienced the failure at Kadesh, where ten spies conveyed words of unbelief, causing the whole congregation of Israel to be affected, so that in the end they all fell under God's judgment. The participation of the whole congregation of Israel was so that they would together strive to remove the rebellion from among them; God intended, through the participation of the whole congregation of Israel, to constitute a corporate memory — this was to become a very good reminder to them in days to come.

Why was he to be stoned to death? All the people were to throw stones, once again emphasizing the seriousness of breaking God's command, so that every Israelite who participated would know it; secondly, when a person is stoned to death, it cannot be determined which particular stone took away his life, and in this way those who carried it out could be spared from bearing the guilt of shedding another

person's blood. Being stoned to death outside the camp became the manner in which the Israelites carried out the death penalty.

Verse 36: "So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died."

Moses had received a definite instruction that came from God, and the whole congregation took this man outside the camp and, according to God's charge, stoned him to death. The Israelites had experienced the failure at Kadesh and had also tasted the pain of openly defying God and causing the whole congregation to suffer punishment. This case provided a principle for handling such matters: if there should again be an Israelite who openly defies God's commandment, then in order to preserve the holiness of the entire body of Israel, this person must be dealt with strictly, and he must be taken outside the camp and stoned to death; in this way the whole nation of Israel can be kept from being affected and from once again being implicated in disaster as a whole.

By the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself abolished the Sabbath, because He is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a type of Christ, and the rest of the Sabbath is to be transformed into obtaining rest in Christ. Therefore, we no longer keep a day in order to obtain rest, but can at any time enter into Jesus Christ and enjoy the true rest. Although the Sabbath no longer needs to be kept, the principle of maintaining the holiness of the church as a corporate body has not changed. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus tells us that if a brother is repeatedly admonished but does not change, and in the end will not hear the church's admonition, then he is to be regarded as a Gentile. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, Paul also told the saints in Corinth to drive out of the church the man who committed fornication and took his stepmother.

Dear brothers and sisters, the church is God's house, and it must maintain holiness, so that the church can suitably testify for Christ. When a saint errs out of ignorance, negligence, or weakness, we are to help him confess his sin and repent, and to bear with him, because God has already forgiven his sin; as for those who openly do evil,

and who repeatedly will not hear admonition and refuse to repent, God does not tolerate it, and we too must not compromise — such a person is to be driven out of the church.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You. You not only look at a person's behavior; You give even greater weight to a person's inward heart. When we are ignorant, when we are negligent, or when we are weak, and we do what we should not do, or fail to do what we should do, You tell us that as long as we come humbly before God to confess our sin and repent, You will forgive all our sins; this is Your exceedingly great grace. Help us also to be this broad, to help those who err unintentionally, and to receive them after they confess their sin and repent. However, those who lift up their hand and openly defy God and do evil, You do not tolerate; we ask You also to grant us wisdom, not to permit such a thing to happen in the church. Because the church is Your body and is to testify for You. Bless the church I belong to, that it may always walk in Your will. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.