

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

Numbers 16:1-11

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we will read Numbers chapter 16. Today we will read verses 1 through 11.

Numbers chapter 14 records that Moses brought the congregation of Israel to Kadesh. Numbers 20:1 then records that the Israelites set out again from Kadesh, and in between there was an interval of nearly 38 years. These 38 years of wandering were God's punishment of the Israelites' unbelief: the first generation of Israelites all had to die in the wilderness, and only then could the new generation of Israelites enter the promised good land. During this long period of wandering, Numbers uses chapters 15 through 19, five chapters of Scripture in all, to record several important matters, the great majority of which are supplements to the law.

For example, chapter 15, which we have just read, records in detail how much of the grain offering was to be presented together with the sacrifice, and how much of the drink offering was to be presented together with it. The grain offering and the drink offering are both mentioned in Leviticus, but no fixed quantity was given. During this period when they were wandering in the wilderness, God revealed and added definite quantities. The spiritual significance is that at the time of presenting the burnt offering and the peace offering, one is to reckon and examine oneself as to whether a correspondingly beautiful character has grown, and whether there is the actual experience of pouring out oneself.

Very evidently, the Israelites seem not to have understood these hidden spiritual meanings. This is why the rebellion recorded in chapters 16 and 17 could occur. This incident is the only incident recorded during this long period of wandering. We see that the Israelites wandered for such a long stretch of time, and in it there really is nothing worth commending; the only thing remembered turns out to be a terrible incident of rebellion. The main cause of this rebellion was the struggle for power.

In Numbers chapter 12, Miriam and Aaron would not submit to Moses' authority, and God acted to discipline Miriam. Because of this, the Israelites also had their journey delayed by a week. As a result, Miriam and Aaron learned the lesson and came to know that the source of authority is God, and that man represents God and exercises authority on God's behalf; this representative authority is appointed by God and is manifested in that person's relationship with God. God commissioned Moses as the deputy authority because God spoke directly to Moses, no riddles secretly. This actually also reveals that the essence of authority is life; only one whose life is seasoned, who can fellowship directly with God and understand God's will, can suitably be God's deputy authority.

Submitting to authority has always been man's greatest test. At the beginning, Satan fell precisely because he would not submit to God's authority, and he became God's adversary. Adam, in the garden of Eden, was enticed by Satan and did not submit to God's authority; and thus sin entered the world through one man. As a result, Satan also became the ruler of this world; Satan governs this world with sin and death, and Satan is continually seeking all kinds of opportunities, like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Because of unbelief, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. The first generation of Israelites had further lost the qualification to enter the good land; life was difficult, and on top of that there was no hope — this was precisely a good opportunity for Satan to rise up and beguile people. Moses and Aaron, as the leaders, became the objects of Satan's attack.

Verses 1–2: "Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown."

These two verses list three groups of people who rose up to attack Moses, and the principal figure is Korah. He is the great-grandson of Levi and the grandson of Kohath. There in Numbers 3:27, we see that Kohath had four sons: Amram, Izhar,

Hebron, and Uzziel. Moses and Aaron are the sons of Amram, and Korah is the son of Izhar, so Korah is the cousin of Moses and Aaron. The family of Kohath encamped on the south side of the tabernacle. Their duty was to keep and to carry the various most holy vessels in the tabernacle. Therefore Korah must often have had the opportunity to observe at close range how Aaron and his sons fulfilled the office of priest. Especially when carrying these most holy vessels, he had to wait until the priests had covered these vessels before he could carry them. As the days went on, he may have begun to feel discontent because of jealousy. This emotion of discontent was then used by Satan, driving him to rise up and take the lead in accusing Moses and Aaron.

The second group of people are the sons of Reuben, including Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth. The sons of Reuben encamped on the south side of the tabernacle, just on the outer side of the sons of Kohath. Therefore Korah must have had the opportunity to build up a relationship with the sons of Reuben. They took counsel together, intending to rise up and accuse Moses and Aaron. What Korah coveted was Aaron's priestly office; and the sons of Reuben? They must have wanted to obtain Moses' office of administration. Reuben was originally Jacob's eldest son, and he originally had the privilege of the birthright. But in Jacob's blessing, Reuben lost the blessing of the birthright because he indulged his lust. Reuben's descendants may have felt indignant in their hearts, and they wanted to seize Moses' position of leadership.

The third group of people are the two hundred and fifty leaders in Israel. They must have come from the twelve tribes, and were all men of renown and of position. Perhaps they were the heads of clans, or perhaps the outstanding ones among the young men. They were chosen by the people and entered the congregation of Israel as leaders; this congregation is the gathering of the leaders of Israel. They were frequently before Moses, hearing the charges God gave to Moses. Such a large group of people came together to Moses with a fierce and aggressive momentum. We see that this rebellion was no small matter; it was premeditated and organized, and they were all men of reputation among the Israelites, well liked by the people. They rose up together to oppose Moses and Aaron.

Verse 3: "They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?'"

They gathered together and together attacked Moses and Aaron. Moses was the leader of the Israelites; he could fellowship directly with God and convey God's will. Aaron was the high priest, presenting offerings to God on behalf of the Israelites and leading the Israelites to worship God. These two were both deputy authorities established by God. These people would not submit to the authority God had established. They raised a high-sounding accusation, charging Moses and Aaron with arrogating authority to themselves.

The translation of the Chinese Union Version is very refined, but the original text is actually very direct. The KJV translates it as "You take too much upon you," and the NIV translates it as "You have gone too far." If translated into Chinese it would be: you have gone too far. Why have they gone too far? Since every one of the congregation of Israel is holy, and the LORD is also among them, why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD? I wonder whether the saints, hearing this, find it very familiar? Almost all those who run mass movements have a similar line of argument. They place themselves together with the masses, and show that they are speaking up for the masses and striving for the welfare of the masses. Therefore, the words can be said in a high-sounding and resounding way. In fact, he is holding the masses hostage in order to seek his own private gain. Regrettably, the eyes of the masses are all blind, the ears of the masses all like to hear flattering words, and the masses have no ability to judge for themselves.

They say that every one of the congregation of Israel is holy. If the congregation were truly holy, they would not be wandering in the wilderness. The LORD indeed was among them, and this was because Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites, and Aaron offered sacrifices on behalf of the Israelites, and so God did not forsake the Israelites. Moses and Aaron did not exalt themselves at all; their offices were bestowed by God. It was precisely because they served competently that the congregation could become the assembly of the LORD.

In Exodus 19:3–6, there we see that God's original will was indeed for all the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests, all rising up to serve God — this is God's best will; but the Israelites could not keep up. In the incident of the golden calf in Exodus chapter 32, they sinned against God, and lost the right to serve God. God raised up the sons of Levi, who with the sword killed those Israelites who would not repent. In Leviticus chapter 8, Moses performed for Aaron and his sons the rite of consecration to the holy office, so that they took up the office of priest, helping the Israelites to present offerings to God.

In Numbers 3:11–12, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine.'" God chose the Levites to serve God in place of the Israelites. God's eternal will is for Israel to become a kingdom of priests, serving God; but the Israelites could not keep up, and so God's way of leading the Israelites changed. God first chose the tribe of Levi to serve God in place of the Israelites. Only when the Israelites are all prepared will God's eternal will be accomplished.

According to Zechariah 8:20–23, we see that this must wait until Christ comes again and establishes the millennial kingdom on earth, when the whole house of Israel will become priests serving God. This group of people headed by Korah did not understand God's will at all, nor did they know God's leading; for the sake of seizing authority, they held the masses hostage and rose up to accuse Moses and Aaron of arrogating authority to themselves and placing themselves above the congregation.

Verse 4: "So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face;"

Having heard these untrue accusations of Korah's company, Moses did not defend himself at all; he immediately fell on his face. God called Moses very humble, far surpassing all men on the earth. It is indeed true: facing the severe and untrue accusations of others, he did not speak, did not argue, did not refute, but immediately fell on his face, taking a lower posture. He was not weak, he was not

conceding defeat; rather, he clearly knew that these elite ones among the people had sinned against God and were about to suffer God's severe punishment again. He immediately fell on his face before the LORD, seeking God's mercy. Moses truly was God's faithful servant, faithful in all God's house of Israel. Before these people who accused him and offended him, he still called upon God for their welfare, asking God to show clearly.

Verse 5: "and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, 'Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him.'"

Moses understood God's will, and so he said to Korah and all his company: "You go back first. After a night has passed, tomorrow morning God will Himself show who belongs to God and who is holy. Whoever belongs to God and is holy, God will surely cause him to come near; whoever is chosen by God, God will also cause him to come near."

Moses very wisely created some time and space, letting every person go back and seek. With an extra night of thinking, perhaps they would have the opportunity to see their own fault and be willing to repent. Moses also spoke very clearly: if you are chosen by God, if you belong to God, if you are holy, God will surely draw near to you. God will then, in the process of your drawing near to Him, show His will. Moses here implies that among God's people, authority comes from God, and man cannot seize it by force. A great number of people and a strong following may be able to obtain earthly authority, but God's authority does not lie in numbers, does not lie in a strong following, but in God's will. Only the person who draws near to God can understand God's will, and only he will have the authority God commissions.

Verse 6: "Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company;"

Moses affectionately called out to Korah, and said to these people who accused him: "Do this: go back and prepare censers." The censer is for burning incense to God. Speaking typologically, burning incense is praying to God. Moses here reminds Korah and Korah's company that only by praying to God can one understand God's will. Therefore, Moses told them to go back and prepare censers. Perhaps while preparing them, they could first pray alone and seek God's will. If they were willing to come humbly before God, God would lead them to repent.

Verse 7: "put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

Tomorrow morning all of you bring censers, and before God put fire in the censers and put incense on the censers, and all of you burn incense to God at the same time, and God will show His choosing. The one chosen by God will certainly be able to become holy, able to be completely separated out and to belong to God.

Moses did not defend himself at all; he handed sovereignty into God's hands, asking God Himself to show clearly. Moses was truly worried for Korah and his company. So Moses added a sentence: "You sons of Levi, you have arrogated authority to yourselves!" The term "arrogated authority to yourselves," if translated according to the original text, is: "You have gone too far." This sentence was originally the one Korah and his company used to accuse Moses and Aaron. Moses now gives this sentence back to them, precisely so that they will take heed, stop, and think a bit: is it in fact they who have gone too far, or Moses and Aaron who have gone too far?

After Moses had spoken to Korah and his company, he very likely told everyone to go back and prepare. Wait until tomorrow, and God would certainly show clearly. From verses 8–11, it must be that after everyone had left, Moses spoke further specifically to Korah. Korah was of the family of Kohath, and was Moses' cousin. Although Korah took the lead in rising up to oppose Moses and Aaron, Moses was really worried for Korah. He knew how great the price is for defying God's will.

Moses wanted to exhort Korah privately, hoping perhaps that he could accept Moses' admonition and no longer stubbornly go his own way. We see how broad Moses' heart was.

Verse 8: "Then Moses said to Korah, 'Hear now, you sons of Levi:'"

We see that Moses really was earnest and patient in his exhortation. He exhorted Korah: "Then Moses said to Korah, 'Hear now, you sons of Levi.'" Moses knew that behind Korah there was a group of sons of Levi, all coveting Aaron's priestly office. Moses therefore exhorted Korah with regard to this very issue.

Verse 9: "Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them;"

Moses reminded the sons of Levi that to be able to be separated from the congregation of Israel to serve God and draw near to God, and to handle the affairs of God's tabernacle on behalf of the Israelites — what a privilege this is! And they serve God before the Israelites — what a glory this is! Moses wanted the sons of Levi first to compare themselves with the whole congregation of Israel. They had already received exceedingly great grace from God. Being able to serve God in place of the Israelites — this is what so many Israelites wanted yet could not obtain. Therefore, they should first thank God for such grace.

Verse 10: "and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?"

Next, Moses wanted Korah to think about how he and all the sons of Levi serve God together and draw near to God together, everyone dividing the work with one another, each person able to fulfill his own office. The sons of Kohath keep and

carry the most holy vessels in the tabernacle; the sons of Gershon keep and carry all the soft items; the sons of Merari keep and carry all the structural items, which are many and heavy. In this way all the sons of Levi are able to be coordinated with one another, and this is not a small thing. Why destroy such a harmonious coordination? Why still seek the priestly office? Every office is chosen by God and is also ordained by God; it is not something one can demand for oneself by force.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the New Testament church it is the same. In Matthew 25:14–30, Jesus tells us that God gives talents according to each man's ability: to one He gives five thousand, to another two thousand, to another one thousand. Each person is to fulfill his own office and use the money God gives to do business. Although the money given is different, if you are faithful in your duty, in the end God's reward is the same.

Paul also says this in Romans 12:3–4, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function." When the saints are coordinated together and each member fulfills its function, the body of Christ can then grow healthily. We do not need to demand another's office by force; we need only faithfully complete the commission God has given us, and in this way we can please God.

Verse 11: "Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"

Moses directly pointed out that Korah and his company were not attacking Aaron, but were attacking the LORD God. What is Aaron? His priestly office was bestowed by God; when you complain against Aaron, you are actually complaining against God. How can you be so bold?

In this passage, we see that Moses is indeed worthy to be called God's faithful servant. He himself was attacked, yet he did not defend himself, but instead

admonished those who attacked him not to sin against God. Moses was single-hearted for the good of the Israelites, and for the Israelites to submit to God's will. Moses' service is also the best pattern for every one of us today who serves in the church.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You! Through our reading of Numbers chapter 16, You have set Your faithful servant Moses before us. He was attacked by people, yet he paid it no mind at all; instead he considered those who attacked him, fearing lest they sin against God. Lord, we also ask You to grant us such a heart, such a capacity. As we serve in the church, it is inevitable that we will suffer grievances; we ask You to help us to be delivered from an attitude of self-pity, and instead to faithfully proclaim God's will. And may we be able to help and admonish those who cause our difficulties, helping them to be able to repent, so that every saint in God's house can be of one heart and one mind. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.