

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

Numbers 16: 35-40

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 16. Today, we are reading verses 35 through 40.

Korah of the family of Kohath of the tribe of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben, along with the 250 men of renown who were leaders in the congregation of Israel, rose up together to attack Moses and Aaron. Korah also gathered the whole congregation of Israel at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to watch the great show of seizing authority that he had directed. They seem to have forgotten that the tabernacle of meeting is God's dwelling place, and that to come to the door of the tabernacle of meeting is to come before God. Before this, God had forbore again and again, giving them opportunity to repent; but now they actually made a scene before God, and God forbore no longer.

The glory of God appeared to the whole congregation. God said to Moses and Aaron: "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." Moses immediately fell on his face and pleaded with God not to be angry with the whole congregation because one man sinned. God granted Moses' intercession, and told Moses to charge the people to depart from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. God did a new thing, causing the earth to open its mouth and swallow up Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and all that belonged to them. They went down alive into Sheol, and afterward the earth closed over them again, and they perished from among the assembly.

The congregation of Israel witnessed such a terrifying event, and were panic-stricken; an atmosphere of fear and trembling pervaded among the Israelites. They did not know how God would deal with those 250 leaders, each of whom held a censer in his hand, with unlawful incense in the censer and profane fire in it as well, and who were still standing at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Verse 35: "And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense."

The words of Scripture are recorded very concisely and crisply, without dragging anything out — a fire came out from the LORD and consumed those 250 men who were offering incense. In Leviticus chapter 10, Aaron's two sons Nadab and Abihu offered incense with profane fire before the LORD, and immediately fire came out from the LORD and consumed them. As for these 250 men, they were not priests, they offered their own incense and lit their own fire, and as a result fire came out from the LORD and consumed them as well.

Burning incense is originally a matter that pleases God, but a person must have the right incense, must have the right fire — it must be the fire from the altar; only such burning of incense can please God. The altar is the place where man offers sacrifices to God, and the fire on the altar is the fire of judgment, the fire of refining, and also the fire of consecration. Only by burning incense with this fire can one be accepted by God.

Speaking from the types of the New Testament, burning incense is praying to God. For our prayer to be accepted by God, we must use the fire from the altar, that is, through the salvation that Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. He was judged by God for our sins, and only thus do we have the standing to come before God. Having this standing, when we come to have an audience with God and enter the tabernacle of meeting, the first step is still to pass by the altar and offer sacrifices to God; besides the sacrificial animal presented, there must also be the corresponding grain offering and drink offering. At this time, the fire on the altar becomes the refining fire, burning away all the base and low things within us, in order to make us holy. Finally we must also present the burnt offering, that is, offer our whole person; at this time the fire of the altar becomes the fire of consecration. Only by burning incense with such fire can prayer be accepted by God.

Verses 36-37: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away.'"

After those 250 leaders had been consumed by fire, God charged Eleazar the son of Aaron to pick up the censers out of the fire. Why not tell Aaron? Because Aaron was the high priest, and he had to maintain holiness and could not touch a corpse. Eleazar was a priest, and burning incense was originally the office of the priest. These 250 leaders had sinned against God and were consumed by fire, but the censers they used had burned incense before God; these censers had already become holy and could not be put to any other use.

Therefore, God charged Eleazar to pick up those censers and pour out the incense and fire in the censers in another place, because profane incense and profane fire are offensive to God. The "another place" here should refer to the place outside the camp where unclean things were burned. Afterward the censers were to be collected, because the censers were separated as holy.

Here we need to digress a little and examine what a censer is and what its function is. Because of the way the Chinese Union Version translates, it can easily cause confusion. The Hebrew word for "censer," *machtah*, is here translated as "censer." The same word appears in Exodus 27:3, where it speaks of the various items attached to the bronze altar, such as the pans, the forks, and the firepans, and so on. "Firepan" and "censer" are the same Hebrew word. So the censer is the firepan, made of bronze; the basic function of the censer, or firepan, is to hold the burning coals taken from the altar.

So there in Exodus chapter 27 it is translated "firepan." When the altar needed to have its ashes removed, the priests would take out the burning coals with tongs and put them in the censer, and after the ashes of the altar had been cleared away, they would put the coals back on the altar, because the fire of the altar must not be extinguished. When they were transporting the tabernacle of meeting, they also had to put the burning coals in the censer, and when they encamped again, they

would place the coals back in the altar. This fire of the altar must not be extinguished, because this fire came from heaven.

Within the tabernacle of meeting, all sources of fire must come from the fire of the altar. When the priests lit the lamps or burned incense in the Holy Place, they had to take fire from the altar, and so a priest would take his own censer, put the burning coals from the altar in it, and enter the Holy Place to light the lamps, or go before the golden altar of incense to burn incense. The priest would first take the coals out of his own censer and put them in the golden altar of incense, and then add the specially made holy incense.

When the priest burned incense at the golden altar of incense, he was separated from the ark of the covenant by only one veil, and the priest was able, through burning incense, to bring the people of Israel before God; and this separating veil typifies the body of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, the priest burned incense with a veil in between; by the New Testament, when Christ breathed His last on the cross, the veil was torn in two from top to bottom, and therefore the saints of the New Testament can come directly before God through prayer, to ask for grace, to ask for mercy, for timely help.

In Old Testament times, when the priests carried the coals in the Holy Place, they would also add holy incense in their own censers, which typifies that the priests, serving in the Holy Place, are continually to burn incense and pray to God. In Leviticus chapter 10, Nadab and Abihu precisely did not use the fire from the altar, but burned incense with profane fire, and were immediately consumed by fire from heaven. These 250 leaders committed a greater error: they did not have the status of priests, what they burned was not the holy incense, and what they used was not the fire from the altar.

Actually, in the incident of the rebellion of Korah's company, Moses' original charge was very clear: they were only to bring their censers before God, then put fire in the censers, and then add the holy incense; since they had already come to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, that is, come before God, the fire added would naturally be the fire from the altar, and the incense added would also be the

specially made holy incense. This would completely conform to the regulations of the offerings. Now they acted on their own decision, putting in their own fire and adding their own incense — no wonder they had to be consumed by fire from heaven.

Verse 38: "The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel."

These leaders openly defied God's commandment; it was they who sinned and thus brought judgment upon themselves, resulting in death. They harmed themselves, and their death is not to be pitied; but the censers they used had been presented before the LORD, and therefore had already been separated as holy and could not be put to any other use. God then charged Moses to have these censers hammered into thin bronze plates, to be used to cover the bronze altar, as a sign to the children of Israel.

Bronze typifies judgment. When a person comes before the altar to present an offering to God, the first thing he sees is the bronze covering the altar, that is, the bronze plates hammered out from the censers of those 250 leaders. This is an excellent reminder to the Israelites: do not make light of it; examine yourself strictly as to whether you have transgressed God's commandments. If so, then you must first ask the priest to present for you the sin offering and the trespass offering, first removing the obstruction of sin; otherwise God's judgment is severe.

As for the saints of the New Testament, we no longer need to present sacrificial animals such as oxen and sheep; Christ is the Passover Lamb and has already accomplished redemption for us. We need only confess our own sins and take the precious blood of Christ, so that our sins are forgiven; after that we can, with clean hands and a pure heart, offer the thank offering and the praise offering that please God. The bronze plates covering the altar remind us: only through judgment can one come before God. According to what we are in ourselves, there is no difference

between us and those 250 leaders; but Christ bore God's judgment for us, and so under the covering of the precious blood we have the standing to come before God.

Verse 39: "So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar,"

Eleazar the priest, according to Moses' charge, took their censers out from the heap of dead men, poured the coals in the censers outside the camp, and then had the censers hammered into thin bronze plates, to be used to cover the altar. In this incident of collective rebellion, all who participated received judgment: the ringleaders Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed up when the earth opened its mouth, going down alive into Sheol, remembered by men no more; and the tool the 250 leaders used in the rebellion — the censers — was hammered into thin bronze plates to cover the altar, becoming a warning to the Israelites for generation after generation.

Verse 40: "to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the LORD had said to him through Moses."

The bronze altar was placed in the outer court of the tabernacle of meeting, near the entrance of the tabernacle of meeting. When the congregation of Israel gathered before the tabernacle of meeting, they could all see the bronze altar; and the bronze plates covering the altar came from the bronze censers with which the 250 leaders in the incident of Korah's rebellion offered profane fire and profane incense. This was to remind the Israelites: those who are not descendants of Aaron cannot burn incense before the LORD. The office and authority of serving God come from God; man's ambition, man's scheming, man's contending — none of these can

escape the outcome of being judged by God, and the incident of Korah's company is the best warning.

In the Old Testament, if a person truly had a heart to serve God but was not from the family of Aaron, God opened a back door for such a person: according to the regulations of the Nazirite, he was to separate himself completely as holy unto God, and then he could rise up to serve God.

About 500 years later, among the descendants of Korah there was a man named Samuel, and he is the best example. He did not walk the road of Korah's rebellion, but according to God's regulation became a Nazirite, separating himself and giving himself completely to God; and he obtained the office of high priest, and was even used by God to become a great figure who changed the age of the Israelites.

Aaron, as high priest, is a type of Christ. Every saint of the New Testament has obtained regeneration through the redemption of Jesus Christ; therefore we all have the status and standing to serve God. Even so, we cannot make light of it; we must take Nadab and Abihu as a warning — if we offer profane fire, we will still suffer spiritual death. We need to keep firmly in mind the lesson of Korah's company, to submit to the spiritual authority God has established in the church, and to live out a godly life, and together with the saints to bear a testimony of loving one another, so that the church may shine like a light in this dark generation.

Let us pray together. Dear Lord, from the incident of Korah's company, we see that You are full of abundant mercy and lovingkindness. Although these leaders who offered incense unlawfully were consumed by fire, the censers they used were hammered into bronze plates and used to cover the altar, and so they continue to speak to the Israelites generation after generation, and also speak to the saints of the New Testament.

Every time we come before God, we must first pass through the judgment of the altar. The Israelites of the Old Testament had to resolve the problem of their sin through offering sacrifices again and again. And how blessed are the saints of the New Testament: Jesus Christ offered Himself once for all as a sacrifice, and so we can become holy under the covering of Christ. Help us to examine ourselves often;

every time we come before God, we are to take the precious blood of Christ and confess our sins, so that our sins may be forgiven, and only then can we come with clean hands and a pure heart to have an audience with God.

Through the incident of Korah's company, You let us see that spiritual authority in the church comes from God — it is not man's effort, not man's contending; rather, only when a person is willing, according to the regulations of the Nazirite, to consecrate himself completely and become holy unto God, can we bear the office of priest in the church, to serve God and to serve the saints in the church. We ask God to raise up in the church I belong to a group of coworkers with a pure heart who love the Lord, to rise up together to serve the church, so that the church may become a testimony of light, glorifying God. Such prayer and supplication is in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.