

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Numbers 16: 41-50

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 41 through 50.

Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the 250 men of renown who were leaders in the congregation of Israel rose up collectively to oppose Moses and Aaron. Their not submitting to the deputy authority God had established was not submitting to God; God severely dealt with these men who led the rebellion. This incident should have come to an end there, but this rebellion did not stop with the destruction of the leaders; instead it continued to ferment.

Dear brothers and sisters, man's fallenness is far deeper than we imagine. We suppose that when people see with their own eyes such a severe judgment from God, fear will arise in their hearts and they will not dare to act rashly. But Satan will always make use of every kind of opportunity to destroy the order among God's people, and there are always some people willing to cooperate with Satan and continue to destroy the peace and oneness among God's people.

This reminds us that we must deal with our own feelings of discontent. When there are situations in the church that disturb us, we must first ask God in prayer to show clearly whether it arises from our own natural emotions at work. If not, then we should bring these situations before the elders or deacons of the church and seek a reasonable handling of them. If we do not know how it should be handled, we should also come together before God in prayer and ask God to show clearly the way it should be handled. In short, do not let these feelings of discontent ferment, because as time goes on they will cause a person's love to grow cold, and, more troublesome still, they will be used by Satan and develop into complaining, gossip, and so on, and in the end become a breach and a leak in the church.

The congregation of Israel fell into just such a situation; among them there were some who were influenced by Korah's company and sympathized with what had befallen them, causing this incident of rebellion to continue to spread.

Verse 41: "On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the LORD.'"

The previous day, the whole congregation of Israel had witnessed with their own eyes God's severe judgment. Those who led the rebellion — the three households of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, together with those 250 leaders who took censers and burned incense — added together amounted to about 300 people. The manner in which they were struck down, whether swallowed up when the earth opened its mouth, or consumed by fire from heaven, very clearly points out that this was God's doing and God's judgment.

These were all elite figures among the Israelites, and it is truly regrettable. If one could look at these events objectively, one would recognize that they brought it on themselves. Moses even left them room to repent; it is only a pity that they stubbornly went their own way, until they reached the point of no return.

The congregation of Israel did not have accurate spiritual perception and judgment, and produced a misplaced sympathy. And so on the very next day they rose up together to complain against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD." They completely distorted the facts; this was plainly God's hand executing judgment; moreover, they had openly rebelled against God, and should no longer be counted as God's people. The congregation of Israel complaining in this way is exactly of a piece with the accusation these rebels originally made against Moses and Aaron. Back then they said that all the congregation was holy, every one of them, so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of God?

Populism in human society operates in just this way. If the church is not careful, this kind of political current will surge into the church, and then it will bring

exceedingly great harm to the church. In God's house, it is never populism that has the final say, it is never numbers and force that make a thing right; rather, only what God says counts. And only those faithful servants who serve God's people according to God's will can become God's deputy authority, like Moses and Aaron.

Verse 42: "Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared."

Just as the congregation of Israel were gathering to attack Moses and Aaron, they lifted up their heads and looked toward the tabernacle of meeting, and saw the cloud descend from above the tabernacle of meeting and cover the whole tabernacle of meeting; and in the cloud the glory of the LORD appeared. This situation was exactly the same as the previous day. While the people still did not know how they should respond, Moses and Aaron also saw it.

Verses 43-45: "Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.' And they fell on their faces."

Moses and Aaron knew the situation was not good, and immediately came before the tabernacle of meeting, and then heard the LORD say to Moses, "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." Not only was this scene exactly the same as the previous day, but even the words God spoke were exactly the same as the previous day. The first time the congregation of Israel offended and sinned against God, it may have been out of ignorance or negligence; to offend and sin against God a second time within such a short period of time is to sin knowingly and deliberately.

Moses and Aaron knew the situation was serious, and the two of them immediately fell on their faces and pleaded with God. This is the third time Moses fell on his face

in this incident of rebellion. This time he still interceded for the people, but Moses knew that this time it could not end well; the previous time it could be attributed to those who led the rebellion, and these people had all already been dealt with by God. Therefore this time Moses no longer merely used words, but immediately took action.

Verse 46: "So Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun.'"

Moses' spiritual apprehension was exceedingly high; he knew that when the glory of God appeared, it would certainly not suddenly return. This time, God was determined to deal with those among the people who had an evil heart of unbelief; they were the source from which the rebellion fermented. Therefore Moses immediately charged Aaron to take his bronze censer to the altar and put burning coals in it, then add the holy incense, and quickly go to the congregation to make atonement for them. Moses had already perceived that God's wrath had gone out, and that the plague had begun to break out among the people.

Dear brothers and sisters, why does God call Moses His faithful servant, faithful in all the house of Israel? Because Moses was single-heartedly mindful of the people of Israel; even when the people rose up to attack him, he paid it no mind and still considered the good of the people. At the same time, he was also God's faithful servant, and he knew God's thoughts and intentions. When things could still be retrieved, he pleaded with earnest words and heartfelt feeling; when things could not be retrieved, he immediately took action, asking Aaron the high priest to fulfill the office of priest, to go among the people and burn incense to make atonement for the people.

Verse 47: "Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people."

Aaron was a competent high priest; hearing Moses' charge, he immediately took the bronze censer to the altar and took burning coals, and then added the holy incense. In this moment of urgency, Moses' charge was very precise, and Aaron's action was also completely in place. The fire had to be the fire from the altar; this fire came from heaven, and had burned how many offerings, and was accepted by God; the incense was the specially made holy incense — this was done entirely according to God's instructions.

In Exodus 30:34, we see that the holy incense is compounded from four spices. The first three typify Christ's death, with efficacy in three aspects: Christ Himself passing through suffering unto death; the efficacy of Christ's death toward us, so that we obtain redemption; and Christ's death destroying the devil who has the power of death; the fourth spice typifies Christ's transcendent resurrection. If you wish to know the details of the holy incense, may the saints review the daily Bible reading in Exodus.

Aaron took his own bronze censer, added the fire, put in the incense, and hurriedly ran into the midst of the people of Israel. At this time Aaron must have been in his nineties; at such an advanced age, he still came running into the midst of the Israelites, from which one can see his urgency. He was a high priest mindful of the people. At this time the plague had already broken out among the people, and he saw group after group of people falling down, stricken by the plague. An ordinary person, fearing that he too would be infected with the plague, could not avoid it fast enough; but Aaron completely disregarded his own safety and ran toward the place where the plague was breaking out, and there added the holy incense, making atonement for the people in the midst of the crowd.

Verse 48: "And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped."

"He stood between the dead and the living" — this sentence is too wonderful! The high priest brought redemption into the midst of the crowd; he stood between the living and the dead, and he became the dividing line between the living and the dead. He used the censer to burn incense and stopped the plague, and he stood between the living and the dead; he stood before death and triumphed over death. Those who smelled the holy incense and were redeemed all lived, and were no longer threatened by death.

Aaron, as high priest, is a type of Christ; in this incident, there are at least three aspects in which he resembles Christ: First, Aaron left the holy tabernacle of meeting and entered into the midst of a crowd dying from the plague; Jesus also left the glorious throne in heaven and came to earth to save those who were dead because of sin.

Second, Aaron stood between the living and the dead; Jesus Himself also became the dividing line between the living and the dead, because whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Third, Aaron burned incense with the coals from the altar and stopped the plague; Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself and rose again from the dead, overcoming death. Christ is the reality of that holy incense.

Verse 49: "Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident."

This verse gives us some numbers: those who died in the plague were 14,700. This is a bitter and painful lesson: collective rebellion will suffer God's severe discipline. Adding to it those leaders in the Korah incident who were judged first, about 300 who died, the total death toll of this entire incident approaches 15,000. Perhaps we may feel it is regrettable, perhaps we may feel that God's punishment was too heavy, but I am convinced that God does not slay the innocent. Just as in verse 16:22, Moses called God "the God of the spirits of all flesh" — God knows the condition within every person, and when God executed judgment by the plague, it must also have been targeted. 15,000 people, among a congregation of more than

2 million, is a proportion of less than 1%; we see that God, even in judgment, is still full of mercy and kindness.

Verse 50: "So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped."

Aaron successfully fulfilled the office of high priest, stopped the plague among the people, and returned to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. This is just like Jesus being sent to come to earth to accomplish redemption, and after resurrection ascending again to heaven, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. Moses and Aaron, from the beginning being attacked by people, then having God vindicate them, still interceded in the midst of God's judgment for those who attacked them, and in the end stopped the plague on behalf of the Israelites. Just as Matthew 5:44 says: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

Moses and Aaron have made a beautiful pattern for us; I hope that the saints who are willing to serve in the church may all imitate it and become the Moses and Aaron of today.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, through Numbers chapter 16, we see Moses administering the congregation of Israel according to God's heart, and Aaron as high priest standing between the living and the dead, burning incense and interceding for the people. Although they were attacked by the congregation, they were still single-heartedly for God's people; they are truly a good pattern for our service to the church today.

Dear Lord, grant us such an aspiration, to recognize that the church is Your house, and that the saints in the church are all the Lord's beloved brothers and sisters. Grant us wisdom, grant us faith and love, so that we too may serve all the saints into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even when we suffer grievances and suffer blame, help us to be able to imitate Moses and Aaron, single-heartedly for the building up of the church, and in the process of building to fill up what is lacking

in the afflictions of Christ. We ask God to bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ!