

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

Numbers 17:1-13

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 chapters 17 and 18. Today we will read 17:1-13.

Because of their unbelief, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness of Paran for thirty-eight years. During this long period of time, the Book of Numbers uses only five chapters to record what happened, and most of those chapters concern additional commandments, statutes, and ordinances from God. As for the record of the Israelites' daily life, there is only one major event: the rebellion of Korah's faction.

The history of the Israelites is a foreshadowing of the church today. As the church journeys through the wilderness of the world, the thing that is also most difficult to avoid is disobedience to the representative authority established by God. On the surface, it is disobedience to the people God has chosen; in essence, it is disobedience to God Himself. And at the root of it all, the fundamental cause is actually Satan's scheme. In the previous generation, Lucifer, the archangel, fell and became Satan because he wanted to ascend above the heights of the clouds and be like the Most High; this event is recorded in Isaiah 14:12–15. Satan himself refused to submit to God's authority, and he has also used every kind of scheme to tempt and entice people to disobey God. Our ancestor Adam was deceived by Satan, violated God's command, and was driven out of the Garden of Eden. The Israelites in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament have likewise continually fallen into Satan's schemes.

When Moses wrote the Book of Numbers and looked back on the thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness, the one event he chose to record was the rebellion of Korah's faction. This was a deliberate, planned, organized, collective uprising against the authority established by God. Moses did not defend himself; instead,

he fell on his face three times and interceded for those who had rebelled. When the entire congregation of Israel was influenced and rose up to attack Moses, God twice took the initiative to defend Moses, punishing those who attacked him by sending plagues.

The first time, God used supernatural disasters to destroy those who had taken the lead in the rebellion, including opening the earth to swallow Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their households. He also sent fire from heaven to consume the 250 leaders who had offered incense. The second time, He used a plague against the congregation of Israel who had risen up to attack Moses. Moses immediately instructed Aaron to take a censer, put fire from the altar in it, add incense, and stand between the living and the dead; only then did the plague stop. As many as fourteen thousand seven hundred Israelites died from the plague.

Numbers chapter 17 is a continuation of the incident involving Korah. This time, God took the initiative to make known the spiritual authority whom He had chosen; this time it was through life, not through death. God came forward Himself to make His will known, and to settle the question of spiritual authority once and for all. Dear brothers and sisters, in your past church life, you may have experienced, to one degree or another, struggles over authority within the church. Perhaps you have also been troubled by such incidents, or even forced to take sides and declare your position. You may have been deeply grieved and wondered, How could such a thing happen in the house of God? I believe that God is even more grieved. Therefore, God has placed Numbers chapter 17 in our hands to help us understand the nature of spiritual authority and how to discern who is the representative authority established by God.

Verses 1–2: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father’s house, all their leaders according to their fathers’ houses—twelve rods. Write each man’s name on his rod.’”

After the rebellion of Korah, those who had taken the lead in the rebellion were destroyed, and those who had incited the people to revolt also died. While the

entire congregation of Israel was still in a state of fear and alarm, God took the initiative to speak to Moses. He told Moses to obtain the staffs from the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. These staffs represented their identity and position. The Hebrew word for “rod” here is different from the Hebrew word for the shepherd’s staff used to drive sheep, so I interpret it as a royal scepter.

When Moses went to Egypt to appear before Pharaoh, he carried a rod in his hand; it is the same Hebrew word. This rod represented the authority God had given Moses. Moses used this rod to divide the waters of the sea, and he also used this rod to strike the rock so that water came out. Among the twelve tribes of Israel, each tribal leader had such a rod in his hand, and this rod represented his authority. God instructed Moses to obtain the rods of the twelve tribal leaders and to write each leader’s name on his rod.

Verse 3: “And you shall write Aaron’s name on the rod of Levi, for there shall be one rod for the head of each father’s house.”

The tribe of Levi was set apart to serve God and therefore was not counted among the twelve tribes. Moses took the rods of the twelve tribal leaders, and Aaron was the leader of the tribe of Levi. Therefore, Moses was also to obtain Aaron’s rod and write Aaron’s name on it.

Verse 4: “Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you.”

The Testimony was kept in the Most Holy Place inside the tabernacle. The high priest could enter the Most Holy Place only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to come before the Testimony and meet with God. Moses had built the tabernacle according to the pattern God had shown him on the mountain. He was the builder of the tabernacle, and he was able to communicate directly with God, so he was an exception. He could enter the Most Holy Place before the Testimony and meet with

God whenever he received God's command. God told Moses to place these thirteen rods before the Testimony in the Most Holy Place, the place where God and man met. Why did God tell Moses to do this? The answer is found in the next verse.

Verse 5: "And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you."

God wanted to make known Himself the person whom He had chosen. His way of making this known was to place all thirteen rods before the Testimony, and one of the rods would blossom. The person whose name was written on that rod would be the person God had chosen. All thirteen rods had been cut from trees. They were dried, dead pieces of wood, completely without life. Yet when they were placed before the Testimony, in the presence of God, God would perform the miracle of life. He would give life to the rod He had chosen, causing it to sprout and displaying a sign of life that people could see. In this way, all the Israelites would know clearly whom God had chosen. God's purpose was to make His will known to the Israelites and to reveal the spiritual authority He had established, thereby putting an end to their complaints.

Here God clearly told the Israelites, and He is also telling the church today, three things. First, spiritual authority is chosen by God Himself. A person cannot obtain it through ambition or human scheming. Second, the essence of spiritual authority is life, and specifically life that has passed through death and resurrection. God can give life to a dead piece of wood and cause it to sprout again; likewise, God gives life to the person He has chosen and causes him to manifest the character of new life. Third, the operation of new life can swallow up every negative thing, so that there will no longer be complaints and murmuring.

Dear brothers and sisters, when the church encounters difficulties concerning authority, the only solution is the life of death and resurrection. We must stop all human struggles and arguments, and the whole church must come together before God, kneel down, and wait upon Him. God Himself will make known the person

whom He has chosen. That person will surely be full of the character of new life, just as the dried-up rod sprouted again.

Verses 6–7: “So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, each leader according to their fathers’ houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. And Moses placed the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.”

Moses did exactly as the LORD had commanded. He obtained twelve rods from the leaders of the twelve tribes, one from each tribe, and he also included Aaron’s rod. Each rod had the corresponding leader’s name written on it. Moses then took these thirteen rods into the Most Holy Place and placed them before the Testimony, that is, in the presence of God.

Verse 8: “Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.”

The next day, Moses entered the Most Holy Place and came before the Testimony. There he witnessed a miracle: Aaron’s rod, representing the leader of the tribe of Levi, had sprouted, produced buds, blossomed, and yielded ripe almonds. In only one day, a dried-up piece of wood had come back from the dead. It had even gone through an entire cycle of growth: beginning as a dry piece of wood in winter, sprouting and producing buds in spring, blossoming and bearing fruit in summer, and finally producing ripe fruit and a harvest in autumn. It is especially significant that the fruit was almonds. The Hebrew word is *shaged*, whose root meaning is “to watch” or “to keep watch.”

Jeremiah 1:11–12 says, “Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Jeremiah, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see a branch of an almond tree.’ Then the LORD said to me, ‘You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word.’” The

background of this passage is that Jeremiah, because he was young, was afraid to accept God's calling to become a prophet to the nations. God therefore used the almond tree to encourage Jeremiah, meaning that God would surely watch over him. In other words, under God's watchful care, a dried-up rod could sprout, blossom, and bear fruit in a single day. Whatever comes from God's calling, God Himself will watch over. Such a person is like a dried-up rod placed before God for one day, experiencing death and resurrection, sprouting, producing buds, blossoming, and bearing fruit.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is an experience that every saint who is called by God to serve Him must have. No one can serve God by relying on his own knowledge, ability, or eloquence. A person must be brought before God, experience death and resurrection under God's watchful care, and grow in life until glorious flowers and fruit appear and mature fruit is produced. This is entirely God's work. If there is a calling from God, God Himself will supply, equip, and perfect the person, giving him the ability to serve. If there is no calling from God, human effort, planning, and competition will all ultimately come to nothing and prove futile. Spiritual authority in the church comes entirely from God, and it is manifested through life—not through human support or elections, and certainly not through human desires or schemes. Rather, a person experiences death and resurrection, lives out a mature life, and bears the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When such a person is manifested, others will naturally submit to the authority of that life.

Verse 9: "Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod."

Moses brought all thirteen rods out of the Most Holy Place, that is, out from the presence of God, and showed them to all the Israelites. The leaders of the twelve tribes came forward and took back their own rods. They witnessed that all the rods had been equally dry pieces of wood and had all been placed before the Testimony. Yet only Aaron's rod had sprouted, blossomed, and borne fruit, full of the

manifestation of life. This clearly demonstrated God's choice, and every leader was completely convinced.

Verse 10: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.'"

After the leaders of the twelve tribes took back their rods, God commanded Moses to place Aaron's rod, which had sprouted, before the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. It was to remain as a sign for those who refused to submit to authority, so that they would not continue to complain against God and bring destruction upon themselves. This was the conclusion of the entire rebellion of Korah. Aaron's sprouted rod was to be kept before the Testimony. Hebrews 9:4 says, "which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant;"

As the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness, whenever they moved their camp, they would place the objects that had been before the Testimony inside the ark. Therefore, Hebrews tells us that there were three objects inside the ark: the tablets of the covenant inscribed with the Ten Commandments, the golden pot containing manna, and Aaron's rod that had budded.

This tells us that God's central will is for people to be supplied by manna, grow and mature in life, live a life that conforms to God's commandments, and exercise authority through resurrection life. Above the ark were two cherubim with outstretched wings, their eyes looking toward the cover of the ark. This cover was the mercy seat, upon which the blood of the Lamb was sprinkled. This speaks of how, under the covering of the precious blood, people can satisfy God's requirements of glory, righteousness, and holiness. The ark was the ark of the Testimony of God. On the outside, Christ becomes our righteousness; on the inside, Christ is our supply, causing us to mature in life and to reign in life.

Authority among God's people is not obtained through a mass movement, nor is it seized by human methods. A person must come before God, experience death and resurrection under God's watchful care, grow in life, and manifest the testimony of blossoming and bearing fruit so that everyone can see it. This is the sign of authority. If God's people all follow this God-ordained way, all kinds of complaints and disputes will naturally cease.

Dear brothers and sisters, looking back over your past church life, have the leaders in the church been raised up in this way? If a leader does not have a rich life and does not have a good testimony in his daily living, sooner or later he will hurt the church, and may even persecute the church. A person does not become a church leader simply by attending seminary and acquiring biblical knowledge. True spiritual authority comes from God's choosing, God's watchful care, and God's nurturing. Such a person must manifest a rich life and a good testimony, and must be recognized by the saints in the church, who are willing to submit to him. Only such a person can become a leader in the church.

Verse 11: "Thus did Moses; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did."

Moses was the best example of a leader. Whatever God commanded him, he did exactly as instructed. Even when he was attacked and slandered, he did not defend himself; instead, he interceded for those who attacked him.

Verses 12–13: "So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying: 'Surely we die! We perish! We all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD must die. Shall we all utterly die?'"

Through Aaron's rod that had budded, God revealed the representative authority whom He had chosen. All the Israelites witnessed this miracle. Remembering the fifteen thousand people who had been struck down in the incident involving Korah the previous day, their hearts were filled with awe, and they deeply regretted what

had happened. They said to Moses, “We truly deserve to die; we truly deserve to perish. We were actually deceived into rising up to complain against God and attack the authority established by God. Now we understand that only those whom God has chosen can serve Him in the tabernacle. If we carelessly approach the tabernacle of God, will we die?” A person who can ask such a question demonstrates that he is capable of self-reflection and that his heart is filled with the fear of God. Such a person is not easily deceived again into rising up against the authority established by God. This is also God’s will for His people.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You! Through Aaron’s rod that budded, You have helped us understand that the essence of authority is life, and the source of authority is God. Anyone who is willing to serve in the church must pass through death and resurrection and grow into a rich life, with a good testimony in daily living. Only such a person can bear the responsibility entrusted by God and serve the saints in the church according to God’s heart. Bless the church where I am. Give us a group of spiritual leaders who are after Your heart, able to lead the church in this crooked and perverse generation to shine like lights and bear witness for God. Bless the church where I am. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.