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

Numbers 20: 1

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 20. Today we will read verse 1.

Numbers chapters 15 through 19 record the days when the congregation of Israel wandered in the Wilderness of Paran, for nearly thirty-eight years. During such a long period of time, apart from God reiterating and supplementing His commandments, statutes, and judgments, only one major event is recorded: the rebellion of Korah's group, God's judgment, and God's revealing of spiritual authority.

During all those long years, there is no record of the Israelites complaining that they had no food to eat or no water to drink. These were the two things about which the Israelites most frequently complained after leaving Egypt. In particular, the first generation of Israelites, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, could not enter the good land. They had no hope and should have been the group most likely to complain. Yet they did not complain. Clearly, God continually watched over them and supplied their needs. Although they were wandering in the wilderness, God supplied manna every day and living water every day, enabling them to live in peace and raise the next generation.

The second generation of Israelites grew up in the wilderness, and after thirty-eight years, they had all grown into adults. They grew through the refining environment of wind and sand; through God's provision, they learned to depend on Him. They inherited the promise of the good land and became the new generation of the people of Israel. With this background, let us now read the first verse of chapter 20 :

Verse 1: "Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there."

This was the first month of the fortieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. Let us review what happened. Three months after they left Egypt, they arrived in the Wilderness of Sinai. They stayed there for a period of time, received God's law, and built the Tabernacle. It was not until the twentieth day of the second month of the second year that they set out from Sinai and entered the Wilderness of Paran. At Kibroth Hattaavah, they buried the Israelites who had developed a craving for meat. At Hazeroth, they stayed for seven days, waiting for Miriam's leprosy to be healed. Only after that did they set out again and camp in the Wilderness of Paran.

The name Paran means "place of caverns." It was a place with many caves, and the wilderness was filled with them, making the journey extremely difficult. The Wilderness of Paran was also often called a great and terrible wilderness. It was here that Moses sent twelve spies to explore the land of Canaan. After forty days, the spies met Moses at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran and reported to the congregation of Israel what they had found in the land.

Kadesh was an oasis located right at the boundary between the Wilderness of Paran and the Wilderness of Zin. The word Zin means "flat." The Wilderness of Zin was north of the Wilderness of Paran. Its terrain was flat, unlike the great and terrible Wilderness of Paran. Because ten of the spies brought back an evil report, the congregation of Israel lost faith. They were afraid to enter the good land and wanted to return to Egypt instead. This provoked God's anger, and He judged the first generation of Israelites. Everyone who was twenty years old and above and had been counted in the census, except Caleb and Joshua, was to die in the wilderness.

After God carried out this judgment, the Israelites traveled south from Kadesh and returned to the Wilderness of Paran, where they wandered for thirty-eight years. When the period of wandering was completed, in the first month of the fortieth

year, the congregation of Israel came to the Wilderness of Zin and stayed at Kadesh—the very same place where they had been thirty-eight years earlier.

Thirty-eight years earlier, Kadesh had been an oasis with water to drink. Thirty-eight years later, this oasis had dried up, and there was no water to drink. Thirty-eight years earlier, they had come up from the south, and therefore this Kadesh was described as Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran. At that time, the first generation of Israelites had experienced the abundance of Egypt. Yet even when they arrived at Kadesh and found water there, they still regarded the wilderness as a terrifying place. Therefore, they did not have the faith to enter the good land.

Thirty-eight years later, they came to the same place. Most of the first generation of Israelites had already died out, and the new generation had become the main body of the people of Israel. They had grown up in the wilderness and came to Kadesh. Although the water had dried up, they had experienced God's provision for thirty-eight years. They were full of faith and wanted to continue moving forward into the good land that God had promised them. Because they were full of faith, they saw the very same place differently. The same Kadesh now appeared to them as the Wilderness of Zin, and what lay before them was a flat wilderness.

Dear brothers and sisters, this very brief statement in Numbers 20:1 is filled with spiritual lessons. First, there are no shortcuts in the growth of our spiritual life. Thirty-eight years earlier, they had failed at Kadesh. Thirty-eight years later, they returned to Kadesh and had to start over again. This is like what Christ said to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:5, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works." Wherever we have fallen, we must repent and rise again from that very place. We still need to do the first works that we did in the beginning. There will be many hurdles in the growth of our life. Wherever we have failed, we must rise from that very place and begin again. If we cannot overcome it, we simply cannot move beyond that point.

Second, faith brings genuine sight. It was the same Kadesh. When people had no faith, even with water available, they still saw it as a great and terrible wilderness.

In contrast, people who had faith could see it as a flat wilderness even when there was no water.

Third, thanksgiving produces genuine faith. The older generation of Israelites had experienced many great miracles of God, such as the ten plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea and their journey through it, and the striking of the rock so that living water flowed out. They had experienced so much grace, yet they still did not know how to give thanks. Whenever they encountered difficulties, they complained and began to turn backward.

The new generation of Israelites grew up in the Wilderness of Paran, where life was relatively difficult. Yet every day God supplied manna, and every day God supplied living water. They were filled with thanksgiving for God's daily provision. As Isaiah 30:20–21 says, "And though the Lord gives you The bread of adversity and the water of affliction, Yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, But your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left." They had learned to look to God for His provision in difficult circumstances and to give thanks to God for that provision. Their thanksgiving produced faith in God, and in faith they were able to see the path that God wanted them to take.

Fourth, days without thanksgiving are not remembered by God. The older generation of Israelites did not know how to give thanks. They had no faith and were not worthy to enter the good land. They had to wander in the wilderness until everyone of that generation died in the wilderness. Deuteronomy 2:14 says, "And the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the Valley of the Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the LORD had sworn to them." The older generation of Israelites was completely wiped out by the time they had crossed the Valley of the Zered. Those thirty-eight years were not remembered by God.

Dear brothers and sisters, how many thirty-eight years do we have in our lifetime? If you also have to wait thirty-eight years before you can put off the old self, how much time do you have left in your life? Are you also going to be like the older generation of Israelites and die in the wilderness? To die in the wilderness is to not be remembered by God. Please remember, saints, that from Kadesh to the good land was actually only a journey of a few weeks. They did not need to take thirty-eight years. But if the old self is not put away, we cannot enter the good land and enjoy God's promises. Would you rather die in the wilderness, or enjoy the abundance of God in the good land of promise? Let us learn to give thanks, learn to build up our faith, and enter the land of promise as soon as possible to enjoy all of God's provision.

Fifth, there are still traces of the wilderness journey that can be followed. If we look only at the record from Numbers 13 through chapter 20, we might think that when they arrived at Kadesh, they wandered around the area for thirty-eight years and then began their journey again from Kadesh. Some Bible commentators even believe that they stayed at Kadesh for thirty-eight years. However, in Numbers 33:5–49, Moses recorded the route that the Israelites traveled, beginning from Rameses in Egypt all the way to the plains of Moab on the east side of the Jordan River, recording each stopping place one by one.

Saints, if you count them, there were a total of forty-two stopping places, and each one had a name. This also tells us that every saint, from coming out of the slavery of the world to eventually entering into God's promise, must pass through forty-two stopping places. The Israelites took a total of forty years. Forty is a number of testing. When the Israelites did not believe, God's punishment was that one day would be counted as one year. Perhaps we can infer that God's intention was for them to complete the journey in forty days. Jesus is the best example. He also spent forty days in the wilderness, being tested by the devil. After forty days, He came out of the wilderness and began His earthly ministry. This is also the path that we should take. If we are stubborn and rebellious like the Israelites, perhaps we too may have to spend forty years. Then how much time do we have left to enjoy God's promises?

Thank the Lord. Although the Israelites wandered in the Wilderness of Paran for thirty-eight years, and although those days were not remembered by God, Moses nevertheless recorded every stopping place. If we follow the stopping places that Moses listed in chapter 33, from the first stop through the fourteenth stop, Hazeroth, we are generally familiar with each of them. After Hazeroth, the Israelites came to Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran, but Moses did not record the name of this stopping place. Perhaps they passed through it without setting up camp.

Numbers 33:18 says that after they left Hazeroth, their next stopping place was Rithmah. From Rithmah all the way to Numbers 33:36, they finally camped at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin. This is the very place described at the beginning of Numbers 20. From Rithmah to Kadesh, there were a total of nineteen stopping places. Today, the locations of these stopping places can no longer be determined, and we do not know what they did at these places either, because this period of time was not remembered by God. Nevertheless, Moses told us the name of every stopping place. At the same time, the new generation of Israelites was growing and becoming strong under God's provision. This truly was a special grace from God. When we come to chapter 33, we will have an opportunity to fellowship in greater detail about the spiritual experiences corresponding to these stopping places.

In the first month of the fortieth year, Moses led the Israelites once again to Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin. The first thing recorded at this stopping place was that Miriam died and was buried there. Miriam was Moses' sister. When Moses was born, she was still a young girl, yet she courageously approached Pharaoh's daughter and recommended Moses' own mother to serve as his nurse. From a young age, she already demonstrated the qualities of a leader.

When God called Moses to go to Egypt to deliver the Israelites, Miriam actively stepped forward and cooperated with Moses. When Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea, Miriam demonstrated the characteristics of a prophet. She took a tambourine in her hand and led the women in singing and dancing before the Lord. In Exodus 15:21, she said: "Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!" This was a high point in Miriam's life. Yet in her later years, because she became jealous of Moses' spiritual authority,

Miriam spoke against Moses and was disciplined by God. She was struck with leprosy, causing the entire congregation of Israel to remain there for seven days. Only after Miriam was healed did the entire congregation set out again.

After the Israelites failed and were judged by God to wander in the wilderness for thirty-eight years, they started again from Kadesh. The very first thing recorded here is that Miriam died and was buried. In some sense, this is a negative record. Miriam had once been used by God and had left behind deeds worthy of remembrance, yet in her later years she failed because of jealousy. This shows us that on the spiritual path, there is no such thing as having seniority that allows us to rest on our past. Our life must continue to grow, and our experience must continue to move forward. Whenever we stop progressing, we can stumble and fall.

Miriam's death is a serious warning to us. We cannot rely on our past experiences and use our seniority as an excuse to rest on our accomplishments. No matter how far our spiritual life has progressed, we still need to continue growing, because God is so vast in length, breadth, height, and depth that we can never fully experience Him in our lifetime. Even when we sometimes stumble and fall, we must learn spiritual lessons from the years of wandering.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. You love us with an everlasting love. Once You have loved us, You love us to the very end. The journey of our life will include difficulties. We will also become weak, and we will fail. Yet You continually have Your preserving grace watching over us. Help us to repent and to stand up again and follow You. Lord, help me. Wherever I have fallen, may I stand up again right there. Help me learn the lesson of thanksgiving from my experiences of failure. May my faith be established through thanksgiving, and may I see Your promises through faith. Bless me so that every day of my life may be remembered by You. We pray in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ.