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

Numbers 20: 14-29

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hua Qi. Thank the Lord, it is time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 20. Today, we are reading verses 14 through 29.

At Kadesh, the people of Israel contended because there was no water to drink. God charged Moses to take the rod and, before the people, to speak to the rock to pour out water to quench the people's thirst. However, the people's contending provoked Moses' spirit, and Moses spoke rash words; he did not obey God's charge, and once again struck the rock with the rod; the rock poured out much water, giving the congregation of Israel and their animals to drink. Because Moses did not act according to God's charge and did not hallow the Lord before the people of Israel, God determined that Moses and Aaron would not enter the good land God promised.

Today it is the same: the church is God's house, and God's presence is there. If the leaders of the church do not keep God's charge, God's dealing is severe; I hope that the saints who fulfill duty and serve in the church will all take warning from this. When leaders commit an error, God will rebuke and punish; but as far as the people are concerned, Moses and Aaron were still their leaders, and God still supplied the people through them, so that the people had water to drink.

Verse 14: "Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. 'Thus says your brother Israel: "You know all the hardship that has befallen us,"'"

After wandering 30 years from the Wilderness of Paran, the people of Israel came again to Kadesh, right at the entrance to the good land of Canaan. Going straight north, passing through the territory of the Edomites, they could enter the land of Canaan; this was the quickest and most convenient road. The Israelites had

wandered so long that everyone wanted to enter the land of Canaan as soon as possible, and it must have been the leaders of Israel who suggested this to Moses, and Moses adopted it.

Moses had just been rebuked and punished by God with not being able to enter the good land, and his heart could not help but feel a measure of sorrow; perhaps under such circumstances, he did not inquire of God, but complied with the proposal of the leaders of Israel, and sent messengers to the king of Edom: to request the king of Edom, for the sake of the relationship that the Israelites were their brothers, to grant them a convenience. The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, and the Israelites are the descendants of Jacob, and Esau and Jacob were twin brothers. These messengers recounted to the king of Edom all the hardship they had passed through, hoping that the king of Edom could sympathize with what had befallen his brothers. From a human standpoint, this seems a very good option: first move him by feeling, stir up his heart of compassion, and only then can they put forward their request.

Verses 15-16: "how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border."

The messengers began to set forth the road the Israelites had traveled, starting from Jacob's going down to Egypt with a household of 70 people, after which they dwelt in Egypt a long time. After nearly 400 years, the Egyptians began to afflict them, and they cried out to God, and God heard their voice and sent a messenger to lead them out of Egypt. A people of more than 2 million began a great migration: leaving Egypt, entering the wilderness, heading toward the land of Canaan; this was a great event, and the nations of that time must all have heard of it. The messengers said that now they had already come to Kadesh, right on the border of the country of Edom.

Verse 17: "Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory."

This was the request of the messengers of Israel: they asked the king of Edom to permit the Israelites to pass through the land of Edom. They promised that the Israelites would not walk through their fields and vineyards, would not disturb their daily farming, and would not drink the water from their wells, but would only go along the highway. The word "highway" is translated in the KJV as "the king's highway"; this is an official road, or so-called king's road, and was a road commonly used by the caravans of that time. Beginning at Damascus, it passed through the land of Canaan to Egypt or to Arabia, passing through many countries in between. Of course, every country it passed through had the right to forbid the caravans to pass, and therefore they had to obtain the permission of each country in advance. These messengers promised that the Israelites would only go along this commercial highway, not turning aside to the right or the left, until they had passed through the territory of Edom.

Verse 18: "Then Edom said to him, 'You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword.'"

The king of Edom refused outright, and with a hard attitude, telling these messengers that if you insist on passing through the land of Edom, I will come out with the sword against you.

Verse 19: "So the children of Israel said to him, 'We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more.'"

The messengers of Israel would not give up, and emphasized once again that they would only go along this highway used by everyone, and that if their people and livestock needed to drink water, they would also pay money to buy the water. The messengers further moved him with gain, telling the king of Edom that the Israelites asked for nothing else, only that they be permitted to pass through the territory of Edom on foot.

Verse 20: "Then he said, 'You shall not pass through.' So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand."

The attitude of the king of Edom was still just as hard: he would not allow the Israelites to cross the border, and began to deploy his troops in battle array, warning the Israelites; if the Israelites still insisted on walking through the territory of Edom, the Edomites would begin to attack. Actually the Edomites' course of action is understandable: Esau and Jacob had been separated for nearly 500 years, and the brotherly affection had long since vanished. Moreover, back then Esau was willing to sell his birthright for a bowl of red lentil stew, and his descendants were the same; valuing the material enjoyment before their eyes, they would not care at all about so-called brotherly affection. Especially with such a multitude of Israelites, if they walked into the land of Canaan it would certainly provoke war — why should the Edomites get mixed up in these muddy waters?

Verse 21: "Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him."

The king of Edom would not permit the Israelites to cross the border, and so the messengers of Israel departed. In Deuteronomy 2:4-8, the aged Moses recalls this past event, and mentions that God did not want the Israelites to pass through Seir, because the whole hill country of Seir was the land God had given to Esau as a possession, and God told the Israelites not to contend with the Edomites. So the Israelites went around Seir and traveled eastward toward the road to Moab.

In man's view, the quickest, most convenient road is the best choice, but the road God leads is different: sometimes it is winding and roundabout, sometimes it is full of hardship. However, the road God chooses is always the one most suited to our need, and this is also the hardest part of following God. Many times, the road God leads takes time and effort, and is frequently not very clear, and must be followed step by step; outwardly it really seems inferior to our own choice, and our blind spot is precisely that we do not know ourselves. Man always overestimates his own vision, overestimates his own scope, overestimates his own ability; the road God leads is precisely meant to tear down our old man, and is usually not the quick and convenient road — only when the evil passions and lusts of our old man are nailed to the cross can we live out the likeness of Christ.

Verse 22: "Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor."

Since God would not permit the Israelites to pass through the hill country of Seir, the Israelites went to the northeast, and the next station they encamped at was Mount Hor. The north side of Mount Hor borders Edom, and so the Israelites went around the land of Edom.

Verses 23-24: "And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: 'Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah.'"

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor: Aaron's time had come; he was to die at Mount Hor, and his soul was to be gathered to his fathers. Aaron could not enter the good land God promised, because at Kadesh, when Moses struck the rock and the water of Meribah flowed out, they rebelled against God's command. If I were Aaron, I would certainly cry out at the injustice: it was Moses who struck the rock, not I — why should I suffer calamity along with him? Although Moses was

the leader who took the lead and Aaron was his coworker, the two of them were coordinated together in serving God and serving the people of Israel; if an error was committed, the two of them had to bear it together — this is God's way.

Today, the coworkers in the church serve the church together, and for the road the church travels, all the coworkers bear responsibility; therefore the whole team of coworkers must have a mechanism for arriving at consensus. If there is no consensus, it is better not to act, because in the future, when giving an account before God, no coworker can be exempt from responsibility by saying "I didn't agree." The coworkers are one team, serving God's church together. On this point Paul says it best: the church is the body of Christ, the saints are all members of the body, and all the members must heed the direction of the Head. If every coworker in the church can be one with Christ, then every decision the church makes can naturally be made with one heart and one mind.

Verses 25-26: "Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there."

God ordained that Aaron's time had come, and therefore Aaron's son Eleazar was to be brought up Mount Hor together with him. Aaron was to take off the robes of the high priest, and Moses was to put them on Eleazar; he was to succeed Aaron as high priest of the Israelites. The high priest must wear the holy garments to minister within the tabernacle of meeting, and the transfer of the holy garments represents the transfer of the office; Aaron was to hand down the office of high priest to Eleazar, and Aaron himself was to die on Mount Hor.

Life and death are a great matter for man; when God charged that Aaron's time had come, God was so calm, and Moses and Aaron seem also to have known in their hearts, and very calmly received God's charge. Although because of the incident of the water of Meribah they could not enter the good land as they wished, and there was some regret; yet Aaron served the Lord, and went up the mountain and died before God in God's presence — is this not a glorious thing? Seeing that

his office had a succession, and knowing also that Eleazar would serve God's people and lead them into the good land, there was then no regret.

Verses 27-28: "So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain."

Moses heard God's charge, and it was exceedingly definite and exceedingly clear. Moses then, according to God's charge, took Aaron and Eleazar, and the three of them went up Mount Hor together in the sight of the whole congregation of Israel. This was a solemn and dignified moment: there was no farewell, no reluctance to part; the three of them calmly went up the mountain. All the Israelites watched the three of them go up the mountain; what happened on the mountain they could not see, but they knew God had an arrangement.

On the mountain, Moses stripped Aaron of his holy garments, and Aaron laid down the office of high priest. He had worn these robes for 38 years and served as high priest for 38 years, and he himself had tasted the sour, the sweet, the bitter, and the pungent of it. He had times of exaltation and also times of sorrow, and at the moment of laying down his office, his heart must have been full of reverence and thanksgiving. Moses then put Aaron's holy garments on Eleazar, and he received the office of high priest — just that simply, just that directly. From then on, the spiritual welfare of the Israelites was on his shoulders and also upon his heart. He had always been at Aaron's side, watching how Aaron fulfilled his duty; he had nearly 38 years of pre-service education, and he knew how to bear the office of high priest.

When the handover of the high priest's holy garments was completed, Aaron died on the top of Mount Hor. Aaron climbed Mount Hor himself, which says that Aaron's body was still strong, his ears still keen and his eyes still bright; God said his time had come, and he submitted to God's will, went up the mountain and died before God — what a peaceful and blessed picture this is.

Verse 29: “Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days."

So Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain and returned to the congregation of Israel. All the Israelites saw three men go up the mountain and two men come down, and Aaron's holy garments now worn on Eleazar's body, and they knew that Aaron had died, and the congregation of Israel mourned for Aaron 30 days. I believe that among these there were many tears of guilt, because it was the Israelites' contending over having no water to drink that led to the incident of the water of Meribah. It was precisely because of this incident that Aaron could not enter the good land, and the members of the congregation of Israel who took part in the contending would, to some degree, have had some self-reproach.

Aaron had been together with the Israelites from the very beginning, and from first to last had walked through nearly 40 years of days, in which there were many things worth commemorating and worth remembering, and therefore everyone mourned for him. This also reminds those first-generation Israelites who were still alive that their days too were drawing near. To be able to know the date of one's own death is not necessarily anything but a kind of blessing: a person can prepare himself unhurriedly — what should be dealt with, what should be repaid, what should be apologized for, what should be confessed — he can seize the time and complete it all one by one, so that he can go to meet the Lord with a conscience free of reproach; this is a blessed thing.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. The road the Israelites walked in the wilderness is actually also the road the church is walking today. Remind us that the road You have prepared for the church is not necessarily always quick, not necessarily always convenient, and yet is the one most suited to the church's need. Help us to lay down man's considerations and learn to seek God's will; what You have prepared for the church is certainly the most suited to the church's need. We also pray to You together for the coworkers of the church: grant the coworkers to be of one heart and one mind, that each one may serve the church with a conscience free of reproach. May it be that when each one of us meets the Lord,

we too may be like Aaron, resting peacefully before You, knowing that this whole life has been in Your hands. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.