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

Numbers 21:1-7

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 chapter 21. Today we will read verses 1-7.

Moses and Aaron were at Kadesh, and because of their failure at the waters of Meribah, God did not allow them to enter the Promised Land. Miriam died at Kadesh, and when they came to the next station, Mount Hor, God told Aaron that his time had come. So Moses, Aaron, and Eleazar went up Mount Hor together. On the mountain, Moses took off Aaron's holy garments and put them on Eleazar. The transfer of the holy garments represented the transfer of the office of the high priest. Aaron had completed the journey he was supposed to make, and he died on Mount Hor. Moses and Eleazar then came down from the mountain. From that time on, Eleazar became the high priest of Israel. The people of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

Although there was some regret surrounding Aaron's death because he could not enter the Promised Land, for forty years he had stood beside Moses, worked together with Moses, and served the people of Israel. Now his son Eleazar succeeded him in the office of the high priest, and Aaron's life could be considered complete. How I long that when my time comes, I may be like Aaron—able to depart peacefully, like Aaron; physically strong, with good hearing and clear sight, like Aaron; having completed the responsibility and mission God entrusted to me, like Aaron; and, like Aaron, having a suitable successor to carry on the work. Therefore, I do not consider Aaron's death to be a sad ending, but rather a beautiful period at the end of his life.

Verse 1: "Now the king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim. Then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners."

It seems that while the Israelites were still at Mount Hor, the Canaanites living in the South, under the king of Arad, launched a surprise attack against the Israelites and took some of them captive. The South, or the Negev, was in the southern part of the land of Canaan. It was a barren and dry region inhabited by the Canaanites. In the time of Abraham, there were a total of ten peoples living in the land of Canaan, recorded in Genesis 15:19–21. Nearly four hundred years later, in the time of Moses, the inhabitants of Canaan had become seven nations, whose names are recorded in Deuteronomy 7:1. The Canaanites are included in both accounts. The Canaanites lived in the South, in the southern part of the land of Canaan. If the Israelites passed through the territory of Edom, they would immediately encounter the Canaanites.

At this time, the king of the Canaanites was called Arad, a name that means "a wild ass." He indeed acted impulsively, very much like a wild donkey. He heard that the Israelites were coming by the way of Atharim. The location of Atharim can no longer be determined today. However, the word means "spy," so the KJV translates it as "by the way of the spies." Perhaps the events of the twelve spies entering the land of Canaan thirty-eight years earlier had already spread throughout the land of Canaan. Now the king heard that more than two million Israelites had already reached the border of Edom. King Arad felt threatened, so he impulsively struck first. He brought some troops to attack the Israelites by surprise and took some of them captive. Perhaps his intention was to intimidate the Israelites and warn them that they should not dare enter the land of Canaan.

Verse 2: "So Israel made a vow to the LORD, and said, 'If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.'"

The Israelites of the new generation responded differently when they encountered difficulties. They did not complain. Instead, they came before God and sought Him,

and they were willing to pay a price for the Israelites who had been taken captive. They made a vow to God that if He would deliver the king of Arad and the Canaanites into their hands, they would go to war and destroy the cities of the Canaanites. The Israelites of the new generation had learned that warfare does not depend on themselves but is based upon the promises of God. When the Israelites of the older generation heard the evil report of the ten spies, saying that the inhabitants of Canaan were strong and their cities fortified, all the congregation of Israel lost heart and wanted to return to Egypt. They complained to God, asking why He had brought them into Canaan only to let them die by the sword of their enemies. But the Israelites of the new generation, facing the same Canaanites, were not afraid at all. They simply asked God to deliver the Canaanites into their hands.

The thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness changed the composition of the people of Israel. The Israelites of the older generation gradually died away, while the new generation grew strong. Dear brothers and sisters, the same is true of us. If we are willing to learn the lessons God gives us in the wilderness, we too will experience the old self dying away and the new self becoming stronger. Therefore, Peter encourages us in 1 Peter 1:6–7: "Though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Verse 3: "So the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah."

The LORD answered and agreed to deliver the Canaanites into the hands of the Israelites. The Israelites then went out to fight against the Canaanites and destroyed both the Canaanites and their cities. That place was called Hormah, which means "destruction." This was the first time the Israelites defeated the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, because they now had the promise of God.

Think back thirty-eight years to the older generation of Israelites. When they heard that God, because of their unbelief, was going to make them wander in the wilderness and die there, that generation of Israelites presumptuously went up to attack the Canaanites on their own. Numbers 14:44–45 says: “But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp. And the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.”

The last time they attacked, the Canaanites came down and struck them, completely defeating them at Hormah. The very same place, Hormah, had once been a place of failure and shame for the Israelites. Now, when the Israelites of the new generation encountered the same enemy, they achieved a great victory. This was because they first sought God, and they had His promise. This experience of victory strengthened their faith. There would still be many battles before they could enter the Promised Land, but if we have the promise of God, no matter how strong the enemy may be, there is no need to fear.

Verse 4: “They journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged because of the way.”

They journeyed from Mount Hor. Miriam had died at Kadesh, Aaron had died at Mount Hor, and even Moses himself would not be able to enter the Promised Land that God had promised. No one knew how many of the first generation of Israelites were still left by this time, but when they saw Miriam and Aaron pass away, they should have realized that their own days were also numbered. Now they had already reached the entrance to the Promised Land, but because the Edomites would not allow them to pass through their territory, they had to go around the land of Edom and begin traveling south, toward the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea. Was this not taking them farther and farther away from the land of Canaan? Not only that, but this route passed through a wilderness region with no pasture, no

water sources, and difficult, rugged terrain. The hardships of the environment caused the Israelites to become very discouraged, especially those remaining from the first generation.

Verse 5: "And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.'"

These Israelites who were old but had not yet died remained unchanged in their nature. Once again they began to complain, oppose God, and speak against Moses. Their complaint against God was exactly the same as before: Why did You bring us out of Egypt? Why have You brought us into the wilderness to die? Actually, they knew very well why they were in the wilderness: it was because they lacked faith to enter the Promised Land. God's promises must be received by faith. A person without faith, even when he has the promise of God, cannot attain what God has promised.

Dear brothers and sisters, this principle remains the same in the New Testament. In the New Testament, God has given the saints of the new covenant many rich promises through Jesus Christ. We still must receive these promises by faith. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." A person without faith, even though he has the promises of God, cannot receive them; he has no share in or connection with God's promises. True faith is like gold refined by fire and must pass through many trials. Therefore, James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." When our faith has been tested, we can receive the crown of life. This is the promise of God.

The Israelites who were old but had not yet died began to complain, and many of the Israelites of the new generation were influenced by them and also began to complain: "For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." The Chinese Union Version translates this word as "heart," but the Hebrew word is nephesh, which is generally translated as "soul." "This worthless bread"

refers to the manna that God supplied every day. Their souls were not satisfied with manna. They longed for foods that could stimulate their senses more strongly, such as the garlic, leeks, cucumbers, and various kinds of produce they had enjoyed in Egypt.

The Israelites of the new generation had grown up in the wilderness. Manna was the food they were accustomed to and depended upon for their survival. Although they had never eaten the garlic and leeks of Egypt, they still joined in the complaining. For the saints of the New Testament, the Word of God is the food of our souls. When we receive God's Word in our spirit, that Word can satisfy the needs of our soul and cause the fruit of the Holy Spirit to grow within us. But God's Word can always seem plain and lacking in stimulation. Are there not many times when we, like the Israelites, feel that God's Word is bland and tasteless, and therefore long for the entertainment and pleasures the world offers to satisfy our senses? We need to understand that if our souls become accustomed to the stimulation of the world's pleasures and distractions, we will naturally begin to despise the seemingly plain Word of God. Let us continue and see how God dealt with these complaining Israelites.

Verse 6: "So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and many of the people of Israel died."

This time, the LORD God did not give a warning, nor did He first work through Moses to admonish the Israelites. God directly carried out His discipline. Fiery serpents entered among the people, and when the people were bitten by the serpents, many died. The fiery serpents were poisonous snakes with red markings covering their bodies, and they lived in the wilderness. The place bitten by a fiery serpent would become swollen and inflamed, and severe bites could result in death. As God led the Israelites through the wilderness, it was His hand that protected them from the attacks of these fiery serpents.

Because the Israelites complained and spoke against God and Moses, God simply relaxed His protective hand a little, and the fiery serpents began to attack the

Israelites. Toward the Israelites of the new generation, God seemed to be even stricter. There was no warning; He directly carried out His discipline. I believe that the primary targets of the fiery serpents were those Israelites who were old but had not yet died, along with some of the Israelites of the new generation who had been influenced by them and joined in their complaints.

Verse 7: "Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people."

Here we see that the Israelites of the new generation had progressed much further than the Israelites of the older generation. As soon as they saw the fiery serpents beginning to attack the people, they immediately realized that they were wrong and came to Moses to confess their sin. They knew that it was because they had spoken against God and Moses that they were experiencing God's discipline. As soon as God loosened His protective hand, they suffered disaster. They asked Moses to pray to God and ask Him to take the serpents away from them.

Thirty-eight years earlier, when the Israelites complained against God and suffered a plague, it was Moses and Aaron who took the initiative to pray to God and ask Him to stop the plague. But when the Israelites of the new generation encountered suffering, they took the initiative to confess their sins and ask Moses to pray for them. Their spiritual understanding was more sensitive, and their spiritual life was more mature. Dear brothers and sisters, when you experience suffering, do you know why you are suffering? Do you know how to confess your sins before God and ask Him for forgiveness?

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You! You have given us the grace of salvation, and You have also given us the wisdom to receive salvation. Because of this, we can be separated from the world and, through believing in You, become children of our heavenly Father. But we confess that our old self is still as stubborn as the Israelites of the older generation, causing us to lose many blessings. We also deeply understand that the old self cannot be changed; it must die in the wilderness.

The new self walks the wilderness journey, grows in the wilderness, and becomes strong in the wilderness.

Thank You for giving us manna every day, so that through Your Word our lives can grow. Forgive us for always thinking that Your Word is bland and tasteless, and for longing for the stimulation that comes from the world. Help us recognize the preciousness of Your Word, and also recognize what a blessed thing it is to have the supply of Your Word in the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives! Help us not to pursue lofty words and grand ambitions, nor to pursue extraordinary experiences, but to be willing to be constituted by Your Word in the plain and ordinary circumstances of life, and to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit abundantly in our souls. This is the best and highest blessing. Bless my life each day. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.