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

**Numbers 25: 4-9**

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 25; today we will read verses 4 to 9.

Balaam, a Gentile prophet, could not overcome the LORD's protection, and his curse could not prevail over God's blessing. God had already blessed the Israelites, and Balaam could not reverse that blessing. It was probably before Balaam returned home that he offered King Balak another scheme: instead of trying to curse the Israelites, he would use beautiful women to entice them into sexual immorality.

Balaam had dealt with God several times and knew that the LORD was a holy God. He reasoned that the LORD would not allow the Israelites to defile His holiness. Therefore, he came up with this malicious plan to lead the Israelites into sin so that they would fall under God's punishment. King Balak adopted Balaam's scheme and sent Moabite and Midianite women to seduce the Israelites. At that time, one group among the Midianites had already formed an alliance with the Moabites. The Moabites worshiped Baal of Peor and maintained a large number of temple prostitutes in their temples. It is quite possible that many of the women sent out in this group were temple prostitutes.

The new generation of Israelites had grown up in the wilderness, accustomed to living under harsh conditions. Now that they had camped at Shittim, their lives were much more comfortable and peaceful than they had been in the wilderness. The Israelite women around them lived according to the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of the LORD, and therefore they were very modest and restrained in their conduct. The Israelite men had never encountered women so alluring and bold, especially women who took the initiative to seduce them. As a result, many Israelites engaged in sexual immorality with these women. Physical immorality

often leads to spiritual immorality. The Israelite men began offering sacrifices to Baal of Peor together with these women. They ate food offered to idols and bowed down to the idols with them.

We must never underestimate the seriousness of idolatry. It is a form of spiritual immorality, because it involves joining oneself to an idol. The LORD desires to dwell among His people, and He longs to be united with them. When the Israelites joined themselves to idols instead, they provoked God's anger. As we read the following passage, we will see that a plague began to spread among the people of Israel.

**Verse 4: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.'"**

The LORD's command to Moses was extremely severe. He was to put to death all the leaders of the people and hang their bodies before the LORD in the sun. Only then could God's anger be appeased and the plague stopped. The severity of God's judgment in this matter indicates that this was not merely a case of a few Israelites committing sexual immorality and idolatry. Rather, it was a widespread offense involving many Israelites, and very likely people from every tribe had committed sexual immorality and idolatry. Furthermore, many of the leaders must have taken the lead in committing these sins, causing others to follow their example. This was how so many people came to commit sexual immorality and violate God's commandments.

We know how the Bible describes Moses: he was faithful in all God's house. In other words, he was very faithful in carrying out the ministry God had entrusted to him in serving the Israelites. Whatever God commanded him to do, he did accordingly. There was one occasion when Moses became exceedingly angry because of the rebellion of the Israelites, and he struck the rock a second time. Moses paid a painful price for failing to obey God's command: he was not allowed to enter the good land of Canaan. The incident recorded in this verse appears to be the second time Moses failed to follow God's instructions. This time, God's command was

indeed extremely severe. If all the leaders were put to death, Moses may have been concerned that the entire leadership structure would immediately be left without anyone to fill the positions, potentially causing the whole Israelite society to collapse. Perhaps this was what Moses had in mind, leading him not to carry out God's command fully.

**Verse 5: "So Moses said to the judges of Israel, 'Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.'"**

According to the previous verse, we know that God did not command Moses to deal with everyone who had committed sexual immorality, but rather to deal with all the leaders. In God's judgment, the leaders bore the greatest responsibility. Perhaps many of the leaders themselves had committed sexual immorality. Even if some of them had not, they had still failed to fulfill their responsibilities of supervision. We see that in this matter, God's judgment was intended to address the problem at its source. Only such a severe judgment could leave a deep impression on the people of Israel.

However, Moses did not follow God's command. Instead, he instructed the judges of Israel to put to death everyone under their jurisdiction who had joined himself to Baal of Peor. Moses' approach was more in line with our own way of thinking: whoever commits a sin should be punished for it. But this was not what God wanted. Therefore, although the judges put to death some of those who had joined themselves to Baal of Peor, the plague did not stop.

Dear brothers and sisters, there is a very important spiritual principle here: the Israelites in the Old Testament are a type of the New Testament church. If a church, like the Israelites, falls into widespread spiritual immorality, and the saints have all become accustomed to it, then simply dealing with those who have committed spiritual immorality will no longer be enough to change the spiritual condition of the church. Instead, all the elders and deacons who bear responsibility must collectively repent and confess their sins, and step down from their positions. Only

then might the church have the opportunity to begin again and establish a new structure of spiritual authority. In fact, this was also what God wanted Moses to do.

At that time, physical immorality led to spiritual immorality. But what constitutes spiritual immorality today? It is when the purposes, values, and methods of the world replace the Word of God. In other words, placing the ruler of this world above Christ is no different from the Israelites joining themselves to Baal of Peor. Such a church will inevitably fall into a prolonged state of spiritual weakness unless its entire structure of spiritual authority is reestablished.

**Verse 6: "And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting."**

Because the plague did not stop, Moses wept, and the entire congregation of Israel also gathered at the entrance of the Tabernacle and wept. This may be the only instance in the Pentateuch in which Moses is recorded as weeping. By this time, Moses was already nearly 120 years old. Throughout his life, he had experienced many things and weathered many storms, yet he had remained faithful in following God and pressing forward courageously.

Now they were camped at Shittim, with the land of Canaan right before them. Moses had personally led the new generation of Israelites and watched them grow up in the wilderness. Now they were facing their first collective failure. Although some of those who had joined themselves to Baal of Peor had been put to death, the plague could not be stopped. Moses was at a loss and could not help weeping bitterly. Those Israelites who had remained faithful also wept alongside him at the entrance of the Tabernacle. What profound repentance it must have been, yet there was no hope, because God had not stoped His hand of judgment.

Who would have imagined that while all the people were weeping, an Israelite man came and brought a Midianite woman to his fellow Israelites? Behind this single statement lie at least four forms of even more grievous rebellion.

First, up to this point, the sexual immorality had taken place outside the camp; it had not yet entered the Israelite camp. The camp of Israel was the place where God dwelt among His people, and it had to be kept holy. Yet this man actually brought a Midianite woman into the camp, defiling the dwelling place of the Israelites.

Second, while everyone else was weeping, this man brazenly walked past them with the Midianite woman. He had sinned, yet he still acted arrogantly and showed no repentance. His conduct was truly detestable.

Third, the fact that he passed by the entrance of the Tabernacle suggests that his tent was probably located relatively close to the entrance. This indicates that he was a leader among the Israelites. Yet, despite being a leader, he took the lead in sinning and set a very bad example.

Fourth, he brought the Midianite woman to his fellow Israelites. He was not content to sin by himself but also led others into sin. This also explains why God had commanded Moses from the very beginning to deal with all the leaders.

**Verse 7: "Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand."**

Thank the Lord! Among all those who were weeping, one man stood up and took action. This man was Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron the priest and the son of Eleazar. By this time, Aaron had already died, and Eleazar had succeeded him as high priest. Phinehas was Eleazar's son. Phinehas was probably still a young man. He rose from among the congregation, took a spear in his hand, and followed them.

Let us review the situation at that time. Moses was weeping, and the leaders of the various tribes were also weeping. Among all these people who were weeping, many were older than Phinehas, held higher positions and greater authority than he did, and enjoyed greater respect from others. Yet none of them took action.

Phinehas himself belonged to the priestly family. His responsibility was to assist the people in offering sacrifices to God and worshiping Him; managing the people was not part of his assigned duties. However, when he saw someone openly showing

contempt for God, he took immediate action without seeking anyone else's approval. He did not concern himself with whether that person held a higher position or was older than he was. When he saw the defiling act of sexual immorality, he took a spear and followed them, determined to deal with the matter himself.

**Verse 8-9: "And he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand."**

Phinehas followed the man into the tent and thrust his spear through both of them, piercing them through the abdomen while they were committing sexual immorality. In this way, the plague among the Israelites was stopped. It turned out that God was waiting for one faithful person to take courageous action to remove the defilement and preserve the holiness of the Israelite camp. 1 Chronicles 21:12 tells us that the plague was the sword of the LORD. Therefore, what stopped the sword of the LORD was not pleading, not prayer, and not offering sacrifices, but a spear that could pierce through sexual immorality, a person who was willing to stand with God, and the moral courage to say, "If not me, then who?"

The elderly Moses did not dare to carry out God's command to deal with all the leaders, fearing that the entire administrative structure would collapse. The leaders of the twelve tribes and the judges hesitated and wavered, afraid to deal with Israelites who held power and status. Only Phinehas courageously stepped forward and stood with God. He personally put to death the man and woman who were committing sexual immorality, thereby stopping the sword of God in time.

Dear brothers and sisters, in our church life today, have we ever witnessed things that are inappropriate? Perhaps someone has given free rein to the flesh and caused other saints to stumble. Perhaps worldly trends and fads have entered the church, leaving people powerless to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps

cultural customs have taken the place of the authority of God's Word. Or perhaps the failures of church leaders have led to division within the church.

When we encounter such situations, can we be like Phinehas, taking up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and courageously piercing through these things that displease God, so that the holiness and unity of the church may be preserved? Or will we be like most of the Israelites, weeping over the weakness of the church while choosing to compromise and not daring to stand up for the truth?

John 8:32 says, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." True freedom means no longer being controlled by the flesh and its desires, so that we can freely follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in our daily living and conduct. Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another." In the church life, the Holy Spirit and the flesh cannot coexist. If the works of the flesh cannot be restrained, the Holy Spirit will be unable to lead the church forward. If the church falls into a prolonged state of weakness, what it needs is a Phinehas for today—someone who can remove the influence of the flesh and allow the Holy Spirit to exercise His authority and lead the church forward.

Phinehas courageously put to death the man and woman who were committing sexual immorality, and the plague was stopped. A total of 24,000 Israelites died from the plague. This was the greatest number of deaths in a single incident since the Israelites came out of Egypt. It seems that God was stricter with the new generation of Israelites, judging their wrongdoing more severely. This was because they had received greater grace and had also grown further in life. Luke 12:48 says, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required." God shows no favoritism.

Paul refers to this incident in 1 Corinthians 10:8, writing, "Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell." Paul says that 23,000 people fell in one day, which differs by 1,000 from the number recorded in Numbers. Perhaps those additional 1,000 people were killed by the judges. A thousand people was already a very large number. Perhaps Moses also underestimated the number of people who had committed sexual immorality. He

may have thought that 1,000 was already enough and that the plague should have stopped by then. Little did he realize that the number of people affected by this incident of sexual immorality was far greater.

Dear brothers and sisters, if the life of the church remains weak and stagnant for a long time, we must humbly come before God to seek His guidance and identify the reasons. Once we discover anything that is contrary to God's will, we must learn from Phinehas, be willing to step forward and stand with God, and remove the various factors that are weakening the church.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, we ask You to remember the church to which I belong and its church life. Thank You for protecting the church and not allowing it to be attacked by forces from outside. Please help the church and the saints learn to examine themselves and remove the unholiness within the church. Please also grant us a sensitive spirit and a courageous heart, so that when necessary, we may step forward to preserve the holiness of the church. Please protect and bless the church to which I belong. I pray in the holy name of my Lord Jesus Christ.