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

Numbers 25: 10-18

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 25. Today, we are reading verses 10 through 18.

When the Israelites were encamped at Shittim, the people were enticed by the women of Moab and the women of Midian, and committed harlotry with them, and together with them bowed down to their god Baal of Peor. The anger of the LORD was kindled, and a plague began to spread among the Israelites. God wanted Moses to deal with all the heads of the clans among the people, because God determined that it was the clan leaders who led the way in harlotry, or at the very least had not properly fulfilled their duty of managing and overseeing the people.

However, Moses did not act according to God's charge, but only told the judges to put to death those Israelites who had joined themselves to Baal of Peor. Moses' handling of it in this way did not cause the plague to stop. While Moses and the people of Israel were all weeping over this matter at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, an Israelite man actually walked past before the eyes of everyone, bringing a Midianite woman with him, going to his brethren. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest, saw it, and took a spear and followed after him, entered his tent, and with one thrust pierced both the man and the woman, who were committing harlotry, through the belly. Thus the plague was stopped; those Israelites who died because of the plague were twenty-four thousand in all.

Verses 10-11: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.'"

Phinehas was a young man, and born moreover into a priestly family; his office was to help the people present offerings and to lead the people in worshiping God — managing and punishing the people was not his office. He killed two people within the camp of Israel, becoming defiled with the uncleanness of death, which also seems not to have been fitting. While Moses and the congregation of Israel still did not know how they ought to respond, God Himself set the tone for this matter: God spoke to Moses, saying, Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel. God Himself declared that what Phinehas did accorded with God's heart and turned back God's wrath from the Israelites, and therefore the plague was also stopped.

God then goes on to explain why. God says: because Phinehas, among the Israelites, was zealous with My zeal. The Hebrew word for "zeal" here is qin'ah, whose original meaning is "jealousy," and the Chinese translation should be 嫉妒 (jealousy). The Chinese Union Version translates God's jealousy as 忌邪 ("jealous against evil"), because in ordinary usage jealousy carries a negative sense; the KJV's translation is even more ingenious, translating it as "zealous" — changing one letter, j to z. Both versions ingeniously avoid the word "jealousy." However, I think we should still return to the original text of Scripture: the word God uses is precisely "jealousy."

When two people love each other and a third party comes in between, jealousy will be aroused, because love between people is always conditional, always requires a return, is always limited, and is always temporary. When the person you love falls in love with someone else, you do not receive love in return, and therefore the condition of your loving him can no longer be met, so that you can no longer love him, and your love turns into jealousy; because your love is used up, jealousy causes your love to turn into hatred. Therefore the emotion of jealousy is negative in all human love.

But God loves man with an eternal love, a love that is without condition, that seeks no return, and that is unlimited. God loves man to the uttermost, and will not change. When a person loves other things more than he loves God, these things become idols. When a person begins to bow down to idols, it arouses God's

jealousy, and this jealousy will not turn into hatred, because God's love is unlimited and eternal, and therefore God's jealousy is also positive. God's jealousy is meant to lead man to turn to God once again. In His jealousy God will discipline, and the plague is God's sword and also God's means of disciplining the Israelites. Phinehas was zealous with God's jealousy and removed the harlotry and defilement from among the Israelites, and so stopped God's sword and God's discipline. So God says that Phinehas' action kept God from consuming the Israelites in His jealousy.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is the same with God toward the New Testament church: how willing God is to treat His church with kindness and grace. But when the church commits spiritual harlotry, so that God's holiness and righteousness suffer loss, God must stretch out His hand to discipline. And in His discipline God is also waiting for a Phinehas of today; if someone is willing to take the heart of Christ as his heart, and bravely stand forth and stop up the breach and vulnerability in the church, turning back God's anger, then God's disciplining hand will turn into a hand that dispenses grace.

The difficulties in a church frequently come from a few breaches and vulnerabilities; if they cannot be dealt with properly and in time, they will multiply and spread, affecting many saints, and causing the church to lose her office of testifying for Christ. If the salt loses its savor, how can it be made salty again? Therefore, the church needs people who appreciate the inward feelings of Jesus Christ and are willing to stand forth to stop up these breaches and vulnerabilities, dealing directly with the source of the problem.

In the church, we cannot be men-pleasers, we cannot be indiscriminate "nice guys"; when a saint errs, truly loving him means pointing out his error and leading him to confess his sin and repent, seeking God's forgiveness. If we merely indulge and cover up for him, we instead harm him, and harm the saints around him, and in the end the whole church must suffer loss. We must recognize that the church is God's house; God is holy, and His house too should be holy.

Verses 12-13: "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.'"

God was going to give the covenant of peace to Phinehas. Peace means that peace has been produced between God and man. God is a holy and righteous God, and when man has sinned, there is no peace between him and God; sin must first be dealt with before peace between man and God can be restored. The covenant of peace is the covenant that helps man deal with sin and pay off sin's price, so that man is reconciled to God anew, and this covenant of peace is the covenant of the priestly office.

Here God very clearly points out that the priestly office is to belong to Phinehas and his descendants. Aaron was the first high priest; Aaron had four sons, and Eleazar was the third son, and Eleazar succeeded to the office of high priest. Now Eleazar's son Phinehas was to succeed to the office of high priest, and God promised Phinehas' descendants that they would succeed to the office of high priest generation after generation. In 1 Chronicles 6:4-15 it is recorded that the descendants of Phinehas succeeded to the office of high priest, continuing for twenty generations, all the way until the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed and the temple was ruined; the twenty-first-generation priest, Jehozadak, was carried captive to Babylon, and only then did the service of the priestly system cease.

By the time of the Persian Empire, when the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation were about to be completed, God stirred the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to permit the Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, and this brought forth the three returns of the Israelites. The scribe who led the second return was Ezra; Ezra's genealogy is recorded in Ezra 7:1-5, and we see that Ezra was a descendant of Phinehas. Ezra was the greatest scribe in the history of Israel; he restored God's law and also restored the priestly system of service. God's promise that the descendants of Phinehas would succeed to the covenant of the priestly office was indeed fulfilled.

Of course, the priestly office of the Old Testament all points to Christ. Hebrews 9:11-12, “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” Jesus Christ offered Himself once for all, became the High Priest of better things, and accomplished the ministry of reconciling man to God. And Christ also gives us the office of reconciling with God, making us priests of the gospel. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:18 that God has given us the ministry of exhorting men to be reconciled to God; we have become ambassadors of the gospel, succeeding to the eternal covenant of peace, and God sends us out to seek every son of peace who belongs to God.

Phinehas was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel. Phinehas, as a priest, presented offerings and made atonement for the Israelites; God specially points out that one who is a priest must be zealous with God’s jealousy for God, that is, must have a holy jealousy: seeing that the Israelites have other loves and pursuits apart from God, he must rise up in jealousy for God, and through the offerings lead the Israelites back to God anew. As for the saints of the New Testament, if there is someone in the church who, apart from God, has other loves and pursuits, we too must rise up to exhort and correct, so that the person turns back to God anew.

On this point Paul made the best pattern. In 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, Paul says this: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” The word rendered “jealous” in this verse is in the original precisely jealousy. Paul is the Phinehas of the New Testament; he exhorts the New Testament saints that they must maintain a single and pure heart toward God. The passage that follows tells us exactly who that man and woman were whom Phinehas pierced with one thrust of the spear.

Verses 14-15: "Now the name of the Israelite who was killed, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites. And the name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he was head of the people of a father's house in Midian."

The man who brought the Midianite woman into the camp of Israel was the head of a father's house of the tribe of Simeon, named Zimri; he was the son of Salu. That Midianite woman was named Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; this Zur was the head of a father's house in Midian. At that time the Midianites allied with Moab came from five clans and were called the five kings of Midian; in Numbers 31:8 the names of these five kings are listed. So this man and woman were both from noble families with power and influence, and that is why their behavior could be so brazen, swaggering past before the eyes of everyone and entering the tent to commit adultry.

Zimri and Phinehas form a sharp contrast; both were leaders of the younger generation. Zimri took the lead in harlotry, so that many of the males of the tribe of Simeon followed him in committing harlotry and bowing down to Baal of Peor, and therefore many died of the plague. In the next chapter, when the army is numbered, we will see that the tribe of Simeon paid a bitter and painful price. Phinehas took the lead in clearing away the harlotry, stopped the plague, and received from God the everlasting covenant of peace.

Verses 16-18: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor.'"

Back then Balak king of Moab sent a delegation of princes to the great River to invite Balaam to come and curse the Israelites, and the members of this delegation were the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian. The Midianites allied with the Moabites and participated so actively in the matter of cursing the Israelites.

Although Balaam could not curse the Israelites, he offered a vicious scheme, to make the Israelites fall into fleshly and spiritual harlotry, so that the Israelites would transgress God's commandment and suffer God's punishment. We see that the Midianites responded actively to Balaam's scheme, to the point that even the daughter of Zur king of Midian personally took the field and seduced a clan head of the tribe of Simeon.

Therefore, the LORD charged Moses to send out troops to make war on the Midianites, because the Midianites had harassed the Israelites with their schemes: namely, using female seduction to entice the Israelites, and causing the Israelites to bow down together with them to Baal of Peor, so that God's anger was provoked and a plague was sent, and twenty-four thousand died. God therefore wanted Moses to send out troops to harass the Midianites. So many people died in this plague that a period of recovery and reorganization was needed, and next, in chapter 26, God wants Moses to number the army a second time, because those numbered the first time, except for Joshua and Caleb, had all died in the wilderness; those numbered the second time were all of the new generation of Israelites. Then in chapters 27-30, Moses recounts the law anew to the new generation of Israelites, and only in Numbers chapter 31 is Numbers chapter 25 taken up again, when Moses, according to God's charge, sends out troops to make war on the Midianites.

In today's passage, we see two young leaders with utterly different outcomes: one indulged the lusts of the flesh, committed fleshly harlotry and spiritual harlotry, and was pierced through by a spear; the other had God's holy jealousy, and being of one heart with God, received the covenant of peace.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for so exalting us and giving us the office of priests of the gospel. We have become ambassadors of the gospel, seeking out sons of peace in our daily living, leading people to be reconciled to God; and in the church, offering sacrifices together with all the saints, praising together, and building up the body of Christ together. Bless the church I belong to, and also keep the church holy; raise up in the church many a Phinehas of today, who can stop up the breaches and leaks of the church, so that the church may become a garden of

life, supplying life in grace, and become a beautiful testimony for God on this earth. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.