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

Numbers 21: 21-30

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 21. Today, we are reading verses 21 through 30.

When the Israelites were encamped in the Valley of Zered, the first generation of Israelites who had been numbered had indeed, according to the punishment God had laid down, all died in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb. The new generation of Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for 38 years; they had grown up into adults and had learned the lessons of faith. Moses then led the new generation of Israelites to set out from the Valley of Zered and encamp by the Arnon River; the Arnon River is the dividing line between the Moabites and the Amorites.

God did not want the Israelites to harass the Moabites; Moses then led the Israelites to pass along the east side of the land of Moab, passing Beer, passing Mattanah, passing the river Nahaliel, coming to Bamoth, and then going up to the top of Pisgah; looking eastward from the top of Pisgah, it was all the land of the Amorites. The Israelites traveled very smoothly all along the way, full of God's presence and blessing; they also kept God's command not to harass the Moabites, for their purpose was to go to the land of Canaan that God had promised. On the road they traveled, they dealt kindly with people, unwilling to have conflict with others or to stir up incidents.

Verses 21-22: "Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, 'Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into fields or vineyards; we will not drink water from wells, but we will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory.'"

Sihon was the king of the Amorites. The Amorites originally lived on the west side of the Dead Sea, and later gradually expanded, becoming the strongest and most powerful people in the land of Canaan; therefore in the Bible the Amorites are sometimes used to represent all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. Sihon the Amorite led a portion of the Amorites across the Jordan River, seized the land of the Moabites, and established a kingdom, with Heshbon as their capital.

The Israelites sent messengers to see King Sihon, hoping to be able to borrow the road and pass through King Sihon's territory on their way to the region of Canaan. The messengers of Israel also assured King Sihon that they would not go into his fields or his vineyards, and would not drink water from their wells. The Israelites would only go by the highway, that is, the King's Highway of that time, which was the main road frequently traveled by the caravans of that time doing business among different countries. They would not disturb the living of the Amorites, but would stay on the King's Highway all the way until they had passed through King Sihon's territory. The Israelites hoped to maintain a peaceable relationship with King Sihon, and therefore first sent messengers to negotiate with King Sihon.

Verse 23: "But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel."

Unexpectedly, King Sihon was overbearing and unreasonable; not only would he not permit the Israelites to pass through his territory, but he immediately gathered his people and went out into the wilderness, that is, to the place where the Israelites were encamped, to attack the Israelites. Moses later, in Deuteronomy, looking back on this piece of history, says that it was God who hardened the heart of King Sihon, because God was going to use the Israelites to remove the Amorites. For 400 years earlier God had promised Abraham that when the iniquity of the Amorites was full, the descendants of Abraham would remove the Amorites and possess the land of Canaan as an inheritance.

The Israelites had originally hoped to maintain a peaceable relationship with King Sihon; unexpectedly King Sihon immediately dispatched troops to attack Israel. The Israelites then fought at Jahaz with King Sihon's army. In Deuteronomy 2:31, the LORD said to Moses: "See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to possess it, that you may inherit his land." Since the Israelites had God's promise, they bravely fought against King Sihon's army.

Verse 24: "Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the people of Ammon; for the border of the people of Ammon was fortified."

The LORD God fought for the Israelites, and the Israelites won a great and complete victory. They killed King Sihon with the sword, and also took King Sihon's land. 38 years earlier at Kadesh, ten spies brought a bad report, saying that the inhabitants of the land of Canaan were tall and robust and their cities fortified, and the Israelites saw themselves as grasshoppers, so that the whole congregation of Israel lost faith, was unwilling to go on to Canaan, and wanted to change course and return to Egypt. 38 years later, the new generation of Israelites had learned the lessons of faith, and knew that the secret of warfare does not lie in tall men and big horses, nor in fortified cities, but in whether God has first delivered the enemy into their hands. If it is God's will, they need only go out to fight, and God will defeat the enemy for them.

Sihon king of the Amorites was valiant and skilled in battle, a famous monarch of that time. Psalm 136:18-19 writes thus, "And slew famous kings, for His mercy endures forever—Sihon king of the Amorites, for His mercy endures forever." The psalmist specially commemorates how, in God's lovingkindness, He helped the Israelites slay Sihon king of the Amorites, bringing the iniquity of the wicked to an end. God had already borne with the Amorites for 400 years; now the time had come, and God was going to use the Israelites to call the Amorites to account for their iniquity.

King Sihon was only the first case; the Israelites defeated the formidable King Sihon, and this news must at the time have shaken the neighboring nations. This congregation of Israelites who came out of the wilderness actually defeated King Sihon's powerful army and occupied King Sihon's land, from the Arnon all the way to the Jabbok in the north, and eastward to the border of the people of Ammon. Back then King Sihon had seized the land of the Moabites and the Ammonites, driving the Moabites to the south side of the Arnon and driving the Ammonites to the east. Later the Ammonites built strong defensive works and constructed many solid fortresses, and only then did they stop King Sihon from continuing to expand eastward.

Verses 25-26: "So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and had taken all his land from his hand as far as the Arnon."

The Israelites defeated King Sihon, took all his cities, and dwelt in the cities of the Amorites, including their capital Heshbon and the villages around Heshbon. Heshbon was the capital of Sihon king of the Amorites, a famous great city of that time, and the King's Highway passed through this city. Heshbon is within the territory of today's Kingdom of Jordan, about 20 kilometers southwest of the capital Amman. King Sihon had once led the congregation of the Amorites in war against the previous king of Moab, and had seized from the hand of the Moabites this land east of the Jordan River, southward all the way to the Arnon, and northward to the Jabbok.

Next, from verses 27-30, is a famous poem of that time, commemorating how God was with the Israelites and defeated Sihon king of the Amorites. Moses very wisely quoted this poem, so that later generations, when reading the Scripture, could also somewhat appreciate the elated mood of the Israelites. This poem does not directly describe the triumph of the Israelites, but uses the technique of irony, describing how King Sihon had once led the Amorites in defeating the Moabites and seizing

their cities, and how now the Israelites in turn have made their cities a desolation. The poem also hints at why the Moabites met with calamity, and this too was to become a warning to the Israelites.

Verse 27: "Therefore those who speak in proverbs say: 'Come to Heshbon, let it be built; let the city of Sihon be repaired.'"

Those who composed the poem must have been the Israelites, and this song must have been very popular at that time. The translation of this verse differs between the NIV and the KJV. The NIV's translation has the Israelites ironically calling on the Amorites to rise up and rebuild the city of Sihon, to restore the city of Sihon; therefore the NIV uses the verbs "rebuild" and "restore." If we look at the Hebrew, the original meaning is not rebuild and restore, but simply "build and establish," that is, to repair and to establish, and the KJV uses these two verbs.

Therefore, I adopt the KJV's translation; it is not boasting in victory and provoking the Amorites, calling on them to rise up and newly build the city of Sihon, but is simply describing the scene of that year when King Sihon led his people to come to Heshbon. You came to Heshbon — this Heshbon was a great city of the Moabites; you came, and you built up this city to become the city of Sihon, and established it as the capital of King Sihon.

Verse 28: "For fire went out from Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon; it consumed Ar of Moab, the lords of the heights of the Arnon."

This verse describes the scene of King Sihon's power in that day. King Sihon took Heshbon as his capital, and his army was like a flame — fire went out from Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon. Wherever King Sihon's army went, it consumed like a flame the army and the cities of the Moabites.

Ar was the capital of the Moabites, south of the Arnon. After the Moabites were defeated, they retreated southward and held the Arnon as their boundary, and

they also set up many high places by the Arnon and installed many priests at the high places to pray for blessing for the Moabites. But these high places and priests were consumed by Sihon's army.

Verse 29: "Woe to you, Moab! You have perished, O people of Chemosh! He has given his sons as fugitives, and his daughters into captivity, to Sihon king of the Amorites."

This verse hints at why the Moabites suffered calamity. The Moabites are the descendants of Lot. In Genesis chapter 11, Lot followed his uncle Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and also followed his uncle Abraham into the land of Canaan. He followed at Abraham's side and also came to know the Most High God, the LORD; but later, for the sake of the gain before his eyes, he separated from Abraham, and chose that fertile land east of the Jordan River.

After Lot left Abraham, he gradually moved his tent, and finally moved into the city of Sodom. Although he dwelt in a sinful city, his heart was still toward God, so that when God sent angels to destroy the city of Sodom, He rescued Lot. In 2 Peter 2:7-8 the condition of Lot is described thus, "and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)." Peter calls Lot a righteous man; although Lot was powerless to move away from the sinful city of Sodom, he still was tormented day by day over those lawless deeds — this was Lot's condition.

After the city of Sodom was destroyed, Lot committed incest with his two daughters, producing his descendants the Moabites and the Ammonites. Lot's descendants completely departed from the LORD God and began to worship idols. According to 1 Kings 11:7, the Moabites took Chemosh as their god, and the Ammonites took Molech as their god. The Moabites and the Ammonites left the LORD and worshiped idols, and so brought destruction upon themselves.

Therefore this verse says, Woe to you, Moab! They took Chemosh as their god and called themselves the people of Chemosh. So the poem says, O people of Chemosh, you are all going to perish; the men of Chemosh will be defeated and flee, the women of Chemosh will all be taken captive, and the land, cities, and people of Moab will all be given into the hand of Sihon king of the Amorites. In that day King Sihon's army was truly without peer in its own eyes, striking terror into the Moabites at the mere rumor of it.

Verse 30: "But we have shot at them; Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon. Then we laid waste as far as Nophah, which reaches to Medeba."

In this verse the thrust of the words turns around, returning to the scene of the Israelites defeating King Sihon, "we have shot at them." Although King Sihon's army was powerful and the Amorites were fierce, the LORD God had already delivered them into the hands of the Israelites, and therefore the Israelites say, we have shot at them.

The Israelites' warfare depended on the LORD God, so that the cities of the Amorites from Heshbon to Dibon were all destroyed. Heshbon was King Sihon's capital, and Dibon was an ancient city north of the Arnon; from Heshbon to Dibon all became a desolation. Nophah and Medeba are two great cities lying between Heshbon and Dibon, and in that day the King's Highway passed through Medeba, and then went on to Heshbon. Medeba is today's Madaba; this city is within the territory of today's Kingdom of Jordan, about 30 kilometers south of the capital Amman, and this city is famous for mosaics and is called the City of Mosaics.

This triumphal song of that day vividly describes how Sihon king of the Amorites was once without peer in his own eyes, supposing himself able, like a flame, to devour the Moabites, yet not knowing that it was because the Moabites had forsaken the LORD God to worship idols that the LORD had given the Moabites into King Sihon's hand. Now he was arrogant and conceited, and his iniquity was full, and so the LORD gave him into the hands of the Israelites.

The Israelites at the start, in a peaceable posture, wanted to borrow the road from him; he not only would not permit it, but on the contrary sent out troops to attack the Israelites, and this was precisely also God's will. God was going to fulfill the promise given to Abraham 400 years earlier, that the land of the Amorites would become a desolation. Moses wisely quoted this triumphal song, recording the victorious scene of God's people at that time.

Dear brothers and sisters, the world today is in turmoil, nation attacking nation and people attacking people. We find ourselves in the midst of it, and sometimes we too become confused; but the record in the Bible tells us that human history is held in God's hand, and that the rise and fall of kingdoms is also in God's hand. When we are confused, we need only come back simply and purely before God and seek God's protection and blessing, and we will see that all things work together for good to those who love God.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You. Help us once again to focus our eyes upon You; King Sihon was once without peer in his own eyes, yet when the time came, he was given into the hands of the Israelites. Today this society is full of strife, and the international situation is also unsettled and turbulent, but we are fully assured that You are the Ruler of human history. Help us to fix our gaze and look to You; You will protect the church as You protect the apple of Your eye. The turbulence of the world situation shows precisely that the day of Your return is near. In this age of the last days, help us to lift up our heads and hold them high, to testify boldly for You, and to welcome Your coming again. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.