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

Numbers 22:1-6

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 22. Today we will read verses 1-6.

After the Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years, all the Israelites of the older generation who had been counted in the census had died in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb. The Israelites of the new generation had grown up in the wilderness, sustained by God, and they had learned the lessons of faith. Moses then led the Israelites of the new generation around the territory of Edom, and they did not disturb the Moabites either.

Because God respected their ancestors, Esau and Lot, He specifically instructed the Israelites that they should rather take a longer route than become enemies of their descendants. The Israelites soon arrived east of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. This was a fertile region extending from the Arnon River in the south to Mount Hermon in the north, which was then occupied by the Amorites. In the south was Sihon, king of the Amorites, and in the north was Og, king of Bashan. These two kings were among the most renowned rulers of their time.

They were brave and skilled in battle. They had seized the land of the Moabites and driven the Ammonites eastward. Og, king of Bashan, was particularly fearsome. He was a Rephaite, a man of great stature and extraordinary strength, and people trembled at the thought of him. The Israelites had originally not wanted to become enemies of the Amorites. They only wanted to pass through their territory, cross the Jordan River, and enter the land of Canaan. Unexpectedly, the arrogant and self-important King Sihon directly led his army to attack the Israelites, who were encamped in the wilderness. This fulfilled God's promise to Abraham four hundred years earlier: when the iniquity of the Amorites had reached its full measure,

Abraham's descendants would drive them out and take possession of the land of Canaan.

God delivered the Amorites into the hands of the Israelites. The Israelites then advanced victoriously, first defeating King Sihon's army and then killing King Og of Bashan and his sons. The Israelites took possession of that fertile region east of the Jordan River, stretching from the Arnon River all the way to Mount Hermon. Having defeated two renowned kings in succession, the Israelites became famous throughout the surrounding nations.

Verse 1: "Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho."

The plains of Moab refer to the plain east of the Jordan River, near the Dead Sea, directly opposite the city of Jericho on the western side of the Jordan. The Israelites were to cross the Jordan River from this place and enter the land of Canaan. Jericho would be the first city they attacked after crossing the river. The Israelites camped in the plains of Moab and remained there for a long period. Numbers chapters 22–36 record the events that took place during this time. On the 1st day of the 11th month of the 40th year, Moses began to give the new generation of Israelites God's commandments, statutes, and judgments again. These instructions are recorded throughout the book of Deuteronomy. Moses himself had failed to obey God's command at the waters of Meribah. He struck the rock a second time with his rod and, as a result, was not permitted to enter the Promised Land.

The Pentateuch concludes with Deuteronomy, while Joshua, the leader of the next generation, would lead the Israelites across the Jordan River into Canaan. Why did God lead the Israelites to remain in the plains of Moab for such a long time? What special revelation does this hold for the New Testament church? I would like to present here the most crucial reason first. Perhaps this will help us avoid turning to either side as we follow God and learn to walk with Him in the right way.

The Israelites had followed God in faith, defeated two renowned kings, and driven out the Amorites. It seemed that they would soon enter the Promised Land of Canaan and receive God's promise. Yet the real battle was not on the surface, nor was it physical or material. It was spiritual and hidden. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Therefore, the truly dangerous enemy was not the Amorites, but Satan, who rules over the darkness of this world.

Satan first used the formidable Amorites, like a roaring lion, to frighten the Israelites. When the Israelites followed God in faith and defeated the Amorites, Satan changed his strategy. He then used the Moabites and Midianites, who were more closely related to the Israelites, to corrupt them. The battle shifted from the physical realm to the spiritual realm. This is just as Jesus warned His disciples in Matthew 10:36, “and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’”

The Moabites and Midianites had some ancestral connections with the Israelites several hundred years earlier. Dear brothers and sisters, in those days Satan used every scheme he could devise to prevent the Israelites from entering the land of Canaan, because this concerned God's eternal plan of redemption. The new generation of Israelites certainly suffered losses, but God's eternal purpose was ultimately fulfilled.

Now Christ has completed the work of redemption, and the church has come into being. Even today, Satan continues to use every scheme he can devise to hinder the building up of the church. This concerns God's plan to bring all things together in one, as stated in Ephesians 1:10, “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.” The key to this plan of bringing all things together in one is the church. Ephesians 1:22–23 says, “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” When the church truly becomes the Body of Christ, all things will be brought together in one and placed under Christ's feet.

Therefore, we must learn from the experiences of the Israelites. When the Amorites could no longer attack the Israelites from the outside, Satan used the Moabites and Midianites to corrupt them from within. In the same way, when the church is no longer intimidated by persecution from the outside, Satan begins to use false prophets in an attempt to destroy the faith of the saints and their unity with one another from within.

Verses 2–3: "Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel."

The Israelites had defeated King Sihon and King Og, and their reputation had spread. Balak, the son of Zippor, was the king of Moab at that time. Because God had instructed the Israelites not to harass the Moabites, the Israelites had taken a detour around the eastern side of Moab's territory and maintained friendly relations with the Moabites. King Sihon had previously seized Moabite territory and driven the Moabites south of the Arnon River. Logically, the Moabites should have been glad that the Israelites had destroyed Sihon, king of the Amorites. Why, then, were the Moabites exceedingly afraid and filled with dread instead?

Some Bible commentators believe that Balak was a Midianite whom King Sihon had appointed as king of Moab. According to this view, Balak had originally been a puppet ruler who had to obey King Sihon. Now that Sihon had been destroyed and his territory had fallen into the hands of the Israelites, Balak became fearful. After reading this kind of interpretation, I personally feel that there is insufficient evidence to support it, so I will not adopt it. I will follow the identification given in Scripture: Balak was the king of Moab and therefore was a Moabite.

The Moabites were descendants of Lot, who was Abraham's nephew and had followed Abraham to the land of Canaan. Although Lot knew the LORD God, he valued material and practical advantages even more. He chose the fertile plain east of the Jordan River and separated from Abraham. The Moabites, Lot's descendants, also abandoned the true God and worshiped Baal. They evaluated everything in

terms of personal advantage. Living next to the powerful Amorite king Sihon had already made them anxious and fearful. For the Israelites to take a detour and attack King Sihon should have been good news for the Moabites. But unexpectedly, the Israelites proved so powerful that they not only destroyed King Sihon but also defeated King Og of Bashan in the north.

It was certainly good news that the Amorites were no longer a threat. However, they had been replaced by an even more powerful people—the Israelites. This made the Moabites exceedingly afraid and filled with dread. If the Moabites had known the LORD God, they would have understood that the LORD had restrained the Israelites and instructed them not to harass Moab. They would not have been so afraid, nor would they have taken actions that harmed both others and themselves.

Verse 4: "Then Moab said to the elders of Midian, 'Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.' Now Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time."

It is striking that Balak, the son of Zippor and king of Moab, had a group of Midianite elders around him. The origin of the Midianites is recorded in Genesis 25:1–2. After Sarah died, Abraham took Keturah as his wife, and she bore him six sons. One of them was named Midian, who became the ancestor of the Midianites. While Abraham was still alive, he sent all these sons born to his concubines away to the land of the east. Later, the Midianites became a nomadic people, living primarily in the region northeast of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba.

When Moses was forty years old, he killed an Egyptian and fled to the wilderness of Midian, where he married a Midianite woman. Because the Midianites had lived in the wilderness for a long time, they were adaptable and had a broad understanding of the world. As a result, they were welcomed by different peoples of that time. Some Midianites allied themselves with King Sihon and were appointed as rulers. For example, Numbers 31:8 mentions that the Israelites killed five kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba. Joshua 13:21 also records that

the Midianite chiefs Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba were among the rulers under King Sihon.

These Midianites also formed an alliance with the Moabites, and King Balak of Moab consulted with the Midianite elders about what to do. Balak's words were highly inflammatory. He compared the Israelites to an ox. When an ox grazes, it eats up all the grass around it, leaving nothing behind. Instead of using the ordinary word “eat,” Balak used a vivid word meaning “lick,” portraying an ox as greedily licking every blade of grass around it. In the same way, he depicted the Israelites as licking up every nation around them.

If this had actually been the Israelites' intention, the kingdom of Moab should have ceased to exist long ago. The conclusion of their discussion was that they could not defeat the Israelites militarily and therefore could not confront them directly. They needed to adopt another approach: find someone who could communicate with the spiritual realm and ask him to curse the Israelites. They wanted to use the power of evil spirits to destroy Israel. King Balak's proposal was welcomed by both the Moabite elders and the Midianite elders.

Verse 5: “Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: ‘Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!’”

King Balak sent a group of messengers to Pethor, near the River, to summon Balaam, the son of Beor. The River refers to the great River Euphrates. Five hundred years earlier, Abraham had crossed the Euphrates before entering the land of Canaan. He became the first Hebrew, a word associated with crossing over. Balaam lived in Pethor, near the River.

The straight-line distance from the land of Moab to Pethor near the Euphrates was more than 650 kilometers, a considerable distance. This shows that Balaam must have had quite a reputation. Even people living far away in Moab knew about him.

He was a diviner who could communicate with the spiritual realm. King Balak sent messengers on this long journey to tell Balaam, “Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!” This people was naturally Israel, numbering more than two million, who had come out of Egypt in a vast multitude. They had defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, and occupied his territory. The Israelites were now settled next to the Moabites, making the king of Moab feel deeply threatened.

Verse 6: “Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

The Israelites were far more powerful than the Moabites. Feeling threatened and unable to defeat them in battle, the king of Moab decided to ask Balaam to curse the Israelites. Perhaps the Moabites could use supernatural powers to defeat the Israelites and drive them out of the land. Balak then flattered Balaam, saying that whoever Balaam blessed would be blessed, and whoever he cursed would be cursed. Perhaps Balaam was receptive to such flattery; otherwise, King Balak would not have traveled such a great distance to ask him to curse the Israelites.

The fact that the king of Moab thought of using evil spirits to curse the Israelites exposed the true nature of this battle. It was, in fact, a spiritual battle. This was not simply a matter of nations fighting over territory, nor was it a matter of countries competing for political supremacy. It was a battle between Satan and God, between darkness and light.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have already entered the last days. Nation rises against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Wars continue, and disasters increase. This is not merely a matter of competing for supremacy or material interests. Before Christ returns, Satan is making his final resistance, gathering all the forces of darkness to construct an evil alliance and hinder the return of Christ. Jesus' prophecy on the Mount of Olives tells us this very clearly. Matthew 24:7–14 says:

“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

Therefore, do not assume that the world will become better and better. It will only become worse and worse. Many false prophets will arise, committing all kinds of lawless deeds and causing people's love to grow cold. Yet the Lord promises that whoever endures to the end will be saved. Because the essential nature of this conflict is spiritual warfare, many more people like Balak will arise in the last days, seeking to curse God's chosen people under the new covenant—the church. There will also be many like Balaam who, for the sake of personal gain, will undermine God's church. Moses devoted three chapters to recording the events involving Balaam, showing how seriously God regards this matter. It was not only for the Israelites of that time but also for the saints of the New Testament, because in the last days many false prophets will arise, saying that Christ is here or Christ is there.

If the saints do not have spiritual discernment, they can easily be influenced and blindly participate in all kinds of movements. These movements use the name of Christ as a pretext, but their real objectives are personal gain and power. They mislead Christians into participating blindly, causing them to believe that they are serving God when, in reality, they are damaging the church. Moses devoted three chapters of Scripture to the events involving Balaam precisely to help the saints of the New Testament learn how to discern false prophets.

Before we examine the events involving Balaam in detail, we should first look at the New Testament passages that describe the kind of person Balaam was.

The first passage is 2 Peter 2:15–16, “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet.” Peter tells us that the way of Balaam is the love of unrighteous gain. Balaam knew God's will clearly, yet he compromised with the world for the sake of money and personal advantage.

The second passage is Jude 1:11, “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” Here Jude tells us that the error of Balaam is to persist in pursuing personal gain until one moves toward destruction.

The third passage is Revelation 2:14, “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.” This is a very serious warning. The doctrine of Balaam can actually exist within the New Testament church. It causes the saints to become spiritually defiled by joining themselves to the world.

Now that we understand the way of Balaam, the error of Balaam, and the doctrine of Balaam, I hope God will grant us a heart that seeks Him single-mindedly and a spirit of discernment to recognize false prophets, so that we can protect the church and bear witness to God in purity, without spot or blemish.

Let us pray together: Lord, guard my heart above all else. Especially in these last days, we see turmoil in the world situation, with earthquakes and disasters occurring everywhere, and we know that the day of Your return is drawing near. Grant us a heart that seeks You and a spirit of discernment, so that we may recognize that many false prophets will arise in the last days. Help me, through daily Bible reading, to know Your will more deeply and to understand more clearly how You are leading me. Bless the churches to which we belong, that they may walk in the truth and shine as lights in a crooked and perverse generation, becoming a beautiful testimony of Yours on earth. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.