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

Numbers 22:7–20

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters. This is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 22. Today, we will read verses 7 through 20.

The king of Moab felt deeply threatened because the Israelites had conquered the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and were encamped in the plains of Moab. If it came to war, the Israelites were vastly stronger than the Moabites; Moab had no chance of winning. Therefore, Balak king of Moab sent messengers to Pethor by the Great River to summon Balaam the son of Beor to Moab to curse Israel. Balaam was evidently a renowned sorcerer of his day who functioned as a spirit medium, capable of invoking blessings or disasters upon people. Balak was willing to send for him across vast distances.

Verse 7: "So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak."

This delegation was of considerable stature, comprised of elders from both Moab and Midian. By that time, Moab had formed an alliance with Midian. Interestingly, both of these peoples traced their lineage back to Abraham. The Moabites descended from Abraham's nephew, Lot; the Midianites were descendants of Midian, Abraham's son through Keturah. Yet, despite their ancestral connection to Abraham, they did not know Abraham's God, nor did they inherit the promises given to him. Ultimately, they stood as enemies against Abraham's promised seed.

Dear brothers and sisters, this reminds us that merely having an outward connection to God is not enough, nor is merely knowing about Him. We must

genuinely know God, experience Him, enjoy His divine supply, and lay hold of His promises to truly become a people after His own heart.

The delegation arrived in Pethor by the Euphrates River and located Balaam. They informed him that they were sent by Balak king of Moab with a generous divination fee, seeking his presence in Moab to place a curse on Israel. The term "diviner's fee" in Hebrew is *qesem*, which inherently signifies divination or fortune-telling. It resembles the ancient fortune-teller who took divination fees in exchange for forecasting omens.

However, Balaam was an authentic spirit medium. He may well have heard of the name Yahweh before. When Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, his father Terah took the entire family northward along the Euphrates River until settling in Haran. Haran was situated roughly 50 kilometers west of Pethor. Later, only Abraham crossed the river into the good land of Canaan with Sarah and Lot; his brother Nahor remained in Haran and grew into a great clan. Balaam likely heard the name of the Lord through Nahor's descendants.

Verse 8: "And he said to them, 'Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me.' So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam."

After hearing the words of the elders of Moab and Midian, Balaam invited them to stay the night. After all, they had traveled from afar carrying substantial wealth. In response to their invitation, Balaam declared, "I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me." In modern terms, he was saying, "Let me consult God first, and then I will convey His will to you." At first glance, this sounds quite spiritual. Yet everyone who treats godliness as a means of financial gain hides behind an outward display of piety while acting solely out of self-interest. Therefore, we must not judge a person merely by what they say, but by what they do—observing whether they truly live out godliness and bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That alone reveals true spirituality. Those who master spiritual terminology are not necessarily spiritual people. And so, the dignitaries lodged with him.

Verse 9: "Then God came to Balaam and said, 'Who are these men with you?'"

Balaam did not seek God; rather, God took the initiative to come to Balaam. Because Israel was God's chosen people, He watched over them continually. The Israelites were completely unaware that the king of Moab was hiring a prophet to curse them, and thus had no way to defend themselves. Yet God searches all things. Long before Israel knew anything about it, God had already extended His protective hand, refusing to let the wicked curse His chosen ones. Thus, God confronted Balaam: "Who are these men with you?"

Verses 10–11: "So Balaam said to God, 'Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 'Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.'"

Balaam gave an honest account: Balak king of Moab had sent an entourage begging him to curse the multitude that came up out of Egypt. Their overwhelming numbers filled the land, throwing Moab into dread and fear. Balak intended to weaken Israel through a curse so that he could wage war against them and drive them away.

Verse 12: "And God said to Balaam, 'You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.'"

God's response to Balaam was unmistakable: *You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.* God's will could not have been clearer. God intended to bless Israel and would permit no one to curse them—Balaam included. Had Balaam been a genuine prophet of God, he would have obeyed this charge immediately. The command was absolute: he was not to go.

Verse 13: "So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, 'Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you.'"

Having hosted the royal envoys for the night, Balaam dismissed them the next morning, saying, "Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you." On the surface, Balaam's answer sounded upright.

Dear brothers and sisters, if your profession involves frequent negotiation, you can tell immediately that Balaam was dropping hints. This is what we call reading between the lines—listening to what was said, but paying even closer attention to what was left unsaid. Balaam actually had three ways he could have responded:

The first way was an outright refusal. He had just heard that the Israelites were blessed by God. As a purported prophet of God, he should have submitted to God's word. The most direct response would have been: "I will not go; I cannot curse Israel." He did not even need to mention Yahweh; stating his definitive decision not to go or curse Israel would have shut the door completely with an absolute refusal.

The second way was to say that he wanted to go, but was not permitted. Since the Lord explicitly told him not to curse Israel, he could have been clear with the delegation that God forbade it. If King Balak had other terms, perhaps he could reconsider. That would have been a halfway response, throwing the ball back into Balak's court, implying that if the king could devise another angle, Balaam might still come.

The third way was to signal that he could go, provided the price was right. Here, he completely omitted God's decree that Israel could not be cursed. Instead, he offered an ambiguous reply: the Lord wouldn't let him go, subtly implying that he himself was willing. In other words: *Offer me an incentive enticing enough, and I will come.*

Verses 14–15: “And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, ‘Balaam refuses to come with us.’ Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they.”

Moab's delegation returned to King Balak reporting, “Balaam refuses to come with us.” I have no doubt they recounted the exact scene, analyzing and deliberating with King Balak to uncover Balaam’s real intentions. Their conclusion matched the third interpretation: Balaam was bargaining. He was using Yahweh’s restriction as leverage to extract a higher fee.

To Balak, his very kingdom was on the line. If Balaam could truly curse Israel so that his armies could drive them out, no price was too steep. Balak immediately dispatched another delegation—this one larger in number and comprised of far higher-ranking officials, reflecting the supreme urgency he placed on the matter.

Verses 16–17: “And they came to Balaam and said to him, ‘Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: ‘Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.’”

Arriving before Balaam, the envoys urged him to let nothing hold him back from coming to Balak. This directly addressed Balaam’s previous excuse—that Yahweh was restraining him. Balak now pledged overwhelming honor, promising to fulfill any demand Balaam made, so long as he came and cursed the people. Balak read Balaam like an open book and raised the stakes instantly, handing Balaam an irresistible proposition: extraordinary prestige and a blank check for whatever his heart desired.

Yesterday we examined how the New Testament authors evaluated Balaam: Peter wrote that Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, Jude noted that Balaam’s error led to destruction, and John rebuked the church in Pergamos for harboring those who held the doctrine of Balaam. Every assessment in the New Testament is decidedly negative. One would think believers could easily spot this and steer clear.

The real danger, however, is that such figures wrap themselves in pious terminology and religious rhetoric, leading undiscerning believers to assume they are truly spiritual.

Verses 18–19: "Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me.'"

Balaam's answer sounded exceedingly noble, painting himself as an incorruptible man of integrity. Even if Balak filled his house with silver and gold, he claimed he could never exceed the word of the Lord in matters great or small. In principle, that statement is correct. Yahweh accomplishes all things without needing Balaam, nor could Balaam ever sway the sovereign hand of God. The Lord speaks and it comes to pass; He commands and it stands firm, requiring counsel from no man. Paul captured this best in Romans 11:33–36, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

Thus, when Balaam said he could not transgress the command of the Lord in anything great or small, the theological statement itself was accurate. But he betrayed himself with one phrase: he called Yahweh *"my God."* What right did he have to claim Yahweh as his God? Had he ever genuinely listened to God's voice? The Lord had already commanded him plainly not to curse Israel and forbidden him to go. Why inquire again? Balaam put on this theatrical display solely to look pious before the dignitaries, parading an intimate relationship with God where he purportedly sought divine guidance for every matter overnight. So he asked them to lodge once more, claiming he needed to discover what else the Lord might say. God's will had already been laid bare; what further revelation was there to seek?

Dear brothers and sisters, do we not often find ourselves trapped in Balaam's mindset? We persist in petitioning God over an issue—a career promotion, financial strain, a marital rift, or friction with our children—harboring our own predetermined desires and expectations. God may have already given us the answer: to take a step back or to take the initiative and apologize. But because that is not the answer we want, we keep asking, refusing to stop until we secure our desired outcome. That is the spirit of Balaam. Balaam's eyes were fixed on the glory and riches promised by Balak; his mind was already made up to go, yet he came before God looking for a rubber stamp.

Verse 20: "And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, 'If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do.'"

God examines the hearts of men, and He knew Balaam's inner desires. That night, God came to Balaam again and said, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do." Knowing that Balaam's heart was entirely set on going, God stopped barring his way, issuing only a solemn reminder to speak strictly what He commanded. A prophet's bare minimum duty is to serve as God's mouthpiece, never voicing his own agenda. God's perfect, optimal will was for him not to go. Yet God grants man free will and respects human choice. When Balaam stubbornly resolved to go, God permitted it, commanding him to speak only what He directed. This belongs to God's permissive will. Even within His permissive will, however, man remains bound by God's sovereign decrees.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must seek God's highest and perfect will. Once we know it, we must obey it without endless renegotiation. Deep down, we almost always know what God's best will is in any given circumstance. Yet because our flesh resists submission, we continue to plead. God knows our stubbornness; when we refuse to yield, He permits us to walk in His permissive will. But understand this: walking in God's permissive will almost always brings loss or leads us through

painful detours. In the end, we must return to His perfect will, because His eternal purpose will surely prevail.

What is God's highest will for our lives? 1 Peter 1:3–4 tells us with absolute clarity: "who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Everything we experience on earth today is preparing us to receive that eternal inheritance in heaven. We will encounter various trials, so that even though our outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed day by day. When Christ appears, we will receive praise, honor, and glory. That is God's highest will for us.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for placing the example of Balaam before our eyes. For the sake of unrighteous gain, he took a crooked path and abandoned Your highest will. Let his life stand as a warning to us. In every circumstance we face, Lord, grant us a heart of submission. We desire to pursue Your highest will, even when it feels like a loss in the flesh, knowing it secures our eternal inheritance in heaven. Help us view our lives through the lens of eternity, knowing that our momentary light afflictions are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Bless our daily walk. In the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.