Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi **(Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)**
Numbers 21: 13-20

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 22. Today we will read verses 21-30.

Balaam's place in the Bible is that of a prophet who loved the wages of unrighteousness as stated in 2 Peter 2:15. He followed the way of error and was unwilling to turn back, as stated in Jude 1:11. Since Balaam is a negative example, why did Moses use three chapters in the Book of Numbers to describe the events surrounding Balaam? It is because distorting God's way for the sake of personal gain is a widespread phenomenon. Even in the New Testament, this phenomenon continued to occur repeatedly.

In 1 Timothy 6:5, Paul said that such people regard godliness as a means of gain. In 2 Timothy 3:5, he said that they have a form of godliness but deny its power. Paul specifically instructed Timothy to turn away from such people. When the aged John wrote to the seven churches, he specifically mentioned that the teaching of Balaam had arisen in the church. This is recorded in Revelation 2:14. As a result, a stumbling block was placed before the saints.

Therefore, when we read the account of Balaam today, we should not think that it has nothing to do with us and that we are merely reading a story from the Old Testament. The teaching of Balaam may well be hidden within the church, and it is also possible that, without realizing it, we ourselves may be heading down Balaam's path. I hope that all the saints will learn to examine themselves and develop a spirit of discernment, carefully testing the various things that happen around us. In particular, we must examine all kinds of ministries and activities in the church and avoid distorting God's truth and the practice of that truth for the sake of personal gain.

Yesterday, we read that God's perfect will was for Balaam not to go to the land of Moab and not to curse the Israelites, because they were a people blessed by God. However, when King Balak sent a second delegation of more distinguished officials, promising Balaam even greater honor and rewards, Balaam made up his mind to go. God then permitted him to go according to His permissive will.

Nevertheless, God specifically warned Balaam that he had to do exactly what God told him. God's permissive will comes into play because of human weakness and disobedience. While respecting human freedom, God gives people room to do what they want to do. Even so, people still cannot violate God's perfect will concerning the Israelites: Balaam was not permitted to curse them. Although God had already warned Balaam, as Balaam traveled toward the land of Moab, God was going to warn him once again and make the warning leave a deep impression on him.

Verse 21: "So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab."

Having received God's permission, Balaam could hardly wait to set out. He got up early the next morning, mounted the donkey that had been prepared, and went with the delegation of Moabite officials toward the land of Moab. Normally, preparing for a long journey takes time. The fact that Balaam was able to leave early the very next morning shows that he had already made all the preparations and was simply waiting for God's permission.

Dear brothers and sisters, could this also describe our own condition? Sometimes, we are extremely eager to pursue something, but God continually refuses to lead us in the direction we expect. Therefore, we keep seeking Him earnestly. Then, one day, we finally receive God's permission. Do we also rush off excitedly to carry out what we have been longing to do, just as Balaam did? I would still urge the saints to be careful. Most likely, this is not God's perfect will, but His permissive will. We must firmly resolve not to settle for God's permissive will, but instead to seek His perfect will.

Verse 22: "Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him."

God became angry with Balaam because he went. Some saints may find this puzzling. Didn't God give him permission to go? Why, then, was He still angry? This once again shows that God's best will was for Balaam not to go. Now Balaam was setting out in high spirits. He mounted his donkey and took two of his servants with him. God knew that Balaam's heart, consumed by a love of fame and fortune, had blinded his eyes. God also knew that Balaam was very likely to disregard the boundary God had clearly set: he must not curse the Israelites. The Israelites were God's chosen people, and He regarded them as the apple of His eye. If the Israelites disobeyed God's word, God Himself would discipline them. He would not allow anyone to harm them unless He permitted it.

Therefore, God sent an angel to warn Balaam once again. The angel stood in opposition to Balaam along the road he was traveling. Balaam's eyes had been blinded by his desire for fame and fortune, so naturally, he could not see God's angel. This is truly ironic. Balaam was famous for his ability to communicate with the spiritual realm. It was precisely because of this unusual ability that King Balak had invited him to go to the land of Moab. Yet when God's angel stood in his way, Balaam could not see him.

Verse 23: "Now the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road."

Even more ironically, the donkey actually saw the angel! The Angel of the LORD was not only standing in the road, but also holding a drawn sword in His hand, ready to strike at any moment. As soon as the donkey saw Him, it turned away from the main road and went into the field beside the road. Balaam could not see God's angel, so he thought the donkey had gone crazy. He struck the donkey, trying to make it turn back onto the main road and continue forward.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we first read this passage, we may think that God is truly humorous and that Balaam was incredibly foolish. But how often are we just like Balaam, walking along a dangerous path without realizing it? Perhaps we resort to unscrupulous means to obtain a certain position. Perhaps we take dangerous risks to earn some extra profit. Or perhaps we seek to satisfy our lusts and forget our commitment to remain faithful to our spouses. When we are eagerly pressing forward and encounter an obstacle, we try our best to remove it. Little do we realize that this obstacle may be the very donkey that stood in Balaam's way.

A donkey without spiritual understanding could see God's angel, while Balaam, who was known for his ability to communicate with the spiritual realm, could not see him. The next time we want to satisfy our own desires and happen to encounter an obstacle, we should think of Balaam's donkey. Perhaps our car breaks down, our phone will not turn on, our child needs our attention, or our spouse makes what we consider unreasonable demands. Whenever something disrupts our schedule, please stop and spend some time in God's presence. Perhaps then you will be able to hear God's voice. If you refuse to stop, you may, like Balaam, encounter even greater difficulties.

Verse 24-25: "Then the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again."

After Balaam made the donkey turn back from the field onto the main road, the Angel of the LORD stood farther ahead, still blocking Balaam's way on a narrow path between the vineyards. The vineyards were all enclosed by walls, so there were walls on both sides of this narrow path. The donkey saw the angel with his drawn sword, but Balaam still could not see him. He continued to urge the donkey forward. The donkey had no choice but to press close to the wall, squeezing through the limited space to avoid the sword of the Angel of the LORD. The donkey was trying to protect Balaam's life, but in the process, it pressed Balaam's foot

against the wall and injured it. Because Balaam was blind and could not see the Angel of the LORD, and because the donkey had injured his foot by pressing it against the wall, Balaam struck the donkey again.

Dear brothers and sisters, sometimes we plunge headlong into our own desires and become completely blind to God's hindrances. God then arranges for certain people, events, or things to come and stop us. In the process, we may suffer some minor injury or loss. Yet instead of reflecting on ourselves, we behave just like Balaam: we become furious with the very people or things that have caused us pain. We fail to realize that we are already walking along the edge of a cliff, where one misstep could lead to everlasting regret.

The ability to examine ourselves is essential for every saint. In addition, it is best to set aside a regular time for prayer and fellowship with the Lord every day. When we fail to obey the Lord's commands promptly, at the very least, our regular devotional time allows us to review our words and actions throughout the day. In the light of God's Word, we can see our true condition, and only then can genuine repentance follow. Balaam had already made up his mind. For the sake of fame and fortune, he was determined to go to the land of Moab. When God's warning came, the donkey saw it and responded accordingly in an effort to protect Balaam. Yet because Balaam was blind, he struck the donkey instead. How innocent the donkey was.

Verse 26-27: "Then the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff."

When the Angel of the LORD saw that the first two attempts to stop Balaam had been ineffective and had failed to awaken him from his obsession with fame and fortune, He went farther ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn aside on either the left or the right. The passage was so narrow that only one person could pass through at a time. The Angel of the LORD stood in this

passage with His drawn sword in His hand. When the donkey saw that it could not get past Him, it simply lay down and refused to move. At this point, Balaam became furious. He took the staff in his hand and began beating the donkey.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is exactly what happens when we are eager to satisfy our own desires but encounter obstacles that prevent us from going any further. Because we cannot satisfy our desires, we become furious and begin blaming the people and things around us. We may find Balaam ridiculous, but how often do we ourselves fall into the very same condition as Balaam?

Verse 28: "Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

At this point, God did something very unusual. He opened the donkey's mouth, and the donkey said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

For a donkey to speak is certainly a miracle. However, the event itself is not particularly remarkable, because all things were created by God. God has the authority and the power to change the laws of the natural world. Normally, a donkey cannot speak in human language, and this is a natural law that we have come to take for granted. But God is the Creator, so He can certainly change this law. Therefore, the fact that the donkey spoke is not what is truly remarkable. What is remarkable is why God caused the donkey to speak at that particular moment. God wanted to use the donkey's words to awaken Balaam. Balaam was reputed to be a man who could communicate with the spiritual realm, yet at this moment, his spiritual sensitivity was virtually zero. God had even caused the donkey to speak, but Balaam still showed no spiritual response whatsoever.

A miracle occurs when God cannot get people's attention through the normal course of events, so He changes the laws of nature in the hope of awakening them from spiritual slumber. Therefore, when we encounter a miracle, we should not

focus on how extraordinary it is or try to investigate how it happened. What we should truly pay attention to is what God is trying to say to us through that miracle.

Those who are spiritually sensitive do not need miracles. They can hear God's voice through the phenomena of the natural world. In Romans 8:19–22, Paul tells us that when he hears the wind, the rain, and the thunder, he hears the groaning of creation. Why does creation groan? Because the sons of God have not yet been revealed, and as a result, all creation remains subject to the bondage of corruption. Moreover, all creation eagerly longs to enjoy the glorious freedom of the children of God. Therefore, every chirping insect, every singing bird, and even every roar of a lion is urging the children of God to grow up quickly and manifest the glory of the sons of God.

Those who lack spiritual sensitivity cannot hear God's voice through such changes in the natural world. Sometimes, God must therefore resort to miracles. But when someone like Balaam hears a donkey speaking and still cannot be awakened, it shows just how dull his spiritual perception has become.

Verse 29-30: "And Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!' So the donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?' And he said, 'No.'"

Even after hearing the donkey speak, Balaam still failed to examine himself. Instead, he began carrying on a conversation with the donkey. The donkey asked him, "Why have you struck me these three times?" Balaam replied, "Because you have mocked me! I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." When we read this, we may think Balaam was so incredibly dull that his behavior was laughable. But how often do we behave in the same way? God caused the donkey to speak, which was an unmistakable miracle. Miracles are meant to turn people toward God. Yet Balaam actually began conversing with the donkey. This is truly ridiculous.

Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps this is also our own condition. Sometimes, we become so fixated on something that our eyes are blinded. Because our minds are entirely occupied with that one thing, we become blind to everything else and fail to see what is right in front of us. The donkey even reminded Balaam: “Am I not the donkey you have ridden ever since I was yours? Have I ever disobeyed you by turning into a field before? Have I ever pressed your leg against a wall and injured it? Have I ever lain down and refused to move? Have I ever spoken to you before?” Balaam answered, “No.” Then shouldn’t we ask ourselves, “Why are these things happening now?”

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope we will not regard this incident as merely something amusing. Instead, we should learn to examine ourselves. In our daily lives, are we also like Balaam? Even when God repeatedly places obstacles in our way, do we keep our heads down and charge forward, refusing to turn back until we hit a wall? May the Lord have mercy on us.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for using the account of Balaam to remind us. How much You desire for us to seek Your perfect will! So often, because of our own weaknesses and disobedience, we refuse to accept Your best arrangements and instead seek a path that makes us feel comfortable. Sometimes, out of Your love for us, You arrange various obstacles in our way, yet we still complain about them. Lord, give us a tender heart and a sensitive spirit. When You lead us, help us to hear Your voice. When You block the road ahead of us, help us learn to come before You and seek Your will. Help us lay aside our natural preferences and the things we stubbornly cling to. May we be like little children, simply and wholeheartedly looking to You and following You. Bless our lives today. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!