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

Numbers 22: 31-41

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 22. Today, we are reading verses 31 through 41.

Balaam was on the road to Moab, and God sent a messenger to warn Balaam. The result was very ironic: Balaam, who claimed to be able to communicate with the spiritual realm, could not see, and it was instead Balaam's donkey that saw. The donkey, in order to protect its master, left the main road and stepped into the field, and then walked pressed close against the wall, crushing Balaam's foot. Finally the situation became critical, and the donkey simply lay down on the ground and would not go on. Because Balaam could not see the angel of the LORD, he thought the donkey was throwing a tantrum, and so he struck the donkey three times. Afterward God caused the donkey to open its mouth and speak — this truly was a miracle, and yet it still could not rouse Balaam. Balaam had fallen into spiritual slumber; his spiritual sharpness and perception were inferior even to those of a beast without a spirit.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that "the god of this age has blinded" the minds of "those who do not believe." Balaam was eager for the honor and gain that King Balak offered, and completely forgot God's charge, which was that he must not curse the Israelites. God therefore sent a messenger to warn Balaam once again on the road. In this process, even when the donkey opened its mouth and spoke, Balaam still clung to his delusion and would not wake up.

Verse 31: "Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face."

Finally, the LORD God made Balaam's eyes bright, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way, with a drawn sword in His hand as well. Only then did Balaam recall what the donkey had done, and he broke out in a cold sweat and immediately bowed his head and fell flat on his face. What God opened was not Balaam's physical eyes, but his spiritual eyes, enabling him to see spiritual things.

Several hundred years later, the king of Aram once dispatched a great army to surround the city where the prophet Elisha lived, intending to seize Elisha. Elisha's servant rose early in the morning and went out and saw that the city was already surrounded, and came in a panic to tell Elisha; but Elisha, perfectly calm and composed, told this servant, do not be afraid, our army is greater than theirs. In 2 Kings 6:17, "And Elisha prayed, and said, 'LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

As God in that day sent chariots and horses of fire to protect Elisha, so it is still today. God frequently sends angels and the heavenly host to protect us, especially when we fall into moments of urgent distress. It is only a pity that our eyes cannot see, and therefore we frequently fall into fear. Jesus says in Matthew 6:23, "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" When the light within us has become darkness, we cannot see spiritual things, and how great then will that darkness be.

Proverbs 20:27 says, "The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart." Everyone who has received grace and been saved has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit dwells in a person's spirit, that person's spirit becomes God's lamp, able to shine and able to illuminate his heart. And so a person's mind becomes clear, his emotion becomes pure, and his will is firmly in step with God. At this time, a person is naturally able to see spiritual things. When Balaam's eyes were opened and he could see the Angel of God with a sword in His hand, only then did he discover his own rashness and ignorance, and he immediately fell flat on his face.

Verses 32-33: "And the Angel of the LORD said to him, 'Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live.'"

The Angel of the LORD began to speak to Balaam, and pleaded the cause of his donkey, asking Balaam only why he struck his donkey three times. If his donkey had not seen the Angel of God and turned aside, the Angel of God would long since have killed Balaam and let the donkey live. The Angel of God also told Balaam that He had come to stand against him because Balaam's way was perverse. The original meaning of this Hebrew word for "perverse" is "contrary," that is, he did not listen to God's charge and did the opposite. Whatever deviates from God is perverse, is crooked, is darkness, is rashness.

Verse 34: "And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, 'I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back.'"

When Balaam heard the Angel of God say that the way he was going was contrary to God, he immediately knew in his heart and said, "I have sinned." Dear brothers and sisters, do you think he was truly confessing his sin? No — this was a confession of the mouth without the heart; from the words he speaks next we know that this was only surface talk. Many times, this is also our condition. We do some bad thing and are discovered by others, and then we have no choice but to come before God to confess our sin; but in confessing there is no real repentance, and we also know that we will do it again. Is this true confession of sin? It is not.

Balaam further said that he did not know the Angel of God was standing in the way against him; if the Angel of God were displeased at his going to Moab, he would turn back. These words were said in vain. In fact Balaam had long since known that God did not want him to go to Moab, but he was still determined to go, and God had no choice but to permit him to go. Since God has given man free will, God

respects man's choice. Balaam also knew the principles of God's operation, and therefore this sentence of his was only a surface line of script.

Dear brothers and sisters, Balaam is a typical false prophet: on the surface he appears to be very spiritual, because at every turn he invokes God's name, and yet the things he does are contrary to God's way. This kind of taking God's name as a pretext while walking a crooked road most easily destroys the holiness of the church. Peter in 2 Peter 2:1-3 exhorts the saints: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Therefore, when a false prophet rises up, we are not to listen to the words he speaks, but to look at the things he does.

Verse 35: "Then the Angel of the LORD said to Balaam, 'Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.' So Balaam went with the princes of Balak."

God knew Balaam's thoughts; since he had already determined to go to the land of Moab, God respected his choice. It is just like someone today who determines not to receive the gospel: although God is willing for all men to be saved and for not one to perish, God still respects every person's choice, and lets those who are unwilling to believe go their crooked way. The Angel of God did not force Balaam to turn back; He was only sent by God to warn Balaam once again that he could speak only the words God wanted him to speak. After that, Balaam went with King Balak's delegation of princes to the land of Moab.

Dear brothers and sisters, our God is the Lord who created the universe and all things, and all people, matters, and things are under God's governing. God can use an obedient prophet to reveal God's will, and God can also use a prophet of the Gentiles to carry out God's plan. God warned Balaam again and again that he could

speak only the words God wanted him to speak, precisely in order to declare through his mouth to the Gentiles how God protects His chosen people, the Israelites.

Therefore, a person who can be used by God is not necessarily a person who belongs to God, nor necessarily a person who is protected and blessed by God. There are some saints whose sense of mission is exceedingly strong; they hope that God can use them to do some great thing, and yet in this process they themselves are unwilling to be changed by God, so that they fall completely into the work, treating the gospel as an enterprise to be run. Perhaps they may also build up a considerable enterprise empire; it is only a pity that their own life has not been changed by God, and in the end they all fall into scandal and make God's name suffer shame.

It is precisely to such people that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7:21-23, says this: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" May God have mercy on us that we not fall into the work; may God help us, that our life may grow, and that through the changing of our life we may testify for God; using life to influence life, and in life to build up the church, so that the church becomes God's house, becomes a place where all the saints can experience God, enjoy God, and testify for God.

Verse 36: "Now when Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which is on the border at the Arnon, the boundary of the territory."

Balaam was the prophet whom Balak king of Moab had sent a delegation of princes to invite from beside the great River. When King Balak heard that Balaam had come, he personally went to meet him, coming to a great city beside the Arnon River. The

Chinese Union Version translates it as “capital city,” but in the original text it is simply a city — perhaps the city of Ar. The Arnon River was originally the boundary between the Moabites and the Amorites; now that the Israelites had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites and driven out the Amorites, the Arnon River became the boundary between the Moabites and the Israelites. Balak king of Moab met Balaam here, and his intention was very obvious: he wanted Balaam to come and curse the Israelites.

If a prophet seeks the welcome of the world, how then can he speak for God? God saw through Balaam’s thoughts, and that is why, on the road to Moab, He sent a messenger to warn Balaam once again. I believe this warning left a deep impression on Balaam.

Verses 37-38: “Then Balak said to Balaam, ‘Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?’ And Balaam said to Balak, ‘Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak.’”

As soon as King Balak saw Balaam, it was as though he had seen a savior, and he hurriedly said to Balaam, I sent men in all haste to invite you to come — why did you not come sooner? Now that you have come it is well, and I will certainly cause you to obtain exceedingly great honor and gain. Balaam heard this and said, have I not now come? There is no need to bring up past matters again. However, I also cannot act on my own authority and speak my own words; whatever God wants me to say, that I will say.

On the one hand Balaam did indeed remember God’s warning, but on the other hand he was also truly crafty and far-calculating: at their very first meeting he put the unpleasant words up front, as his own disclaimer. The meaning was that he could only communicate with the spiritual realm, that he could not act on his own authority, and therefore he could only speak the words God wanted him to speak. If these words did not suit King Balak’s heart, he was not to be blamed — the blame could only go to God.

Verses 39-40: "So Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth. Then Balak offered oxen and sheep, and he sent some to Balaam and to the princes who were with him."

King Balak then took Balaam walking along the border, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth. We are not certain where this city was; it must still have been on the border. The original meaning of this Hebrew word Kirjath Huzoth is "city of streets" (a city with many streets), so this must have been a relatively prosperous border city. On the streets people came and went, presenting a scene of prosperity and peace; perhaps this was King Balak's psychological tactic, to build up Balaam's feeling for this city, so that he could curse the Israelites with greater force. King Balak then slaughtered oxen and sheep as sacrifices, and sent the sacrificial meat to Balaam and the delegation of princes accompanying him. This was King Balak's welcome banquet for Balaam, letting him first enjoy himself, and only after he had eaten his fill and drunk his fill would the work begin.

Verse 41: "So it was, the next day, that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, that from there he might observe the extent of the people."

The next morning, King Balak took Balaam to the high places where Baal was worshiped. The Moabites of that time had begun to worship Baal, and had built many high places on the elevated ground at the edge of the city, in order to offer sacrifices to Baal. King Balak took Balaam up to a high place, so that Balaam could gaze out over the camp of Israel. According to King Balak's understanding, one must be able to see a people in order to curse them, and so he specially chose a great city on the border, and went up to the high ground where the camp of Israel could be seen. There they would worship Baal, and would also ask Balaam to curse the Israelites.

And at this time the Israelites were encamped on the plains of Moab, directly facing the city of Jericho west of the Jordan River; they were preparing to enter the good land of Canaan that God had promised. Perhaps Moses was just then teaching the

new generation of Israelites concerning God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances. After the Israelites set out from Mount Hor, they continually kept God's charge: they detoured so as not to pass through the land of the Edomites, because God had given the hill country of Seir to the descendants of Esau; and they detoured so as not to pass through the land of the Moabites, because they are the descendants of Lot. Now the land where the Israelites were temporarily staying was obtained from the hands of the Amorites, and the Amorites had seized the land of the Moabites — so when the Israelites defeated the Amorites, the Moabites ought to have felt glad.

The Israelites could never have imagined that Balak king of Moab would hire a prophet who came from beside the great River to curse the Israelites. But what does it matter? The Israelites did not know, but God still watched over the Israelites. It is just as Zephaniah 3:17 says: "The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." The LORD carries out salvation; He quietly loves His people, He quietly guards His people. Although the enemy has all kinds of schemes, the LORD has already stretched out His mighty arm to protect the people who belong to Him.

God had already warned Balaam not to curse the Israelites; and as in Job 1:10, "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?" God put a hedge around the Israelites on every side to protect the Israelites, not letting the enemy have an opportunity to take advantage and make a surprise attack. Dear brothers and sisters, today our God likewise guards His church, putting a hedge around the church on every side, not letting the enemy attack from without. What a blessed group of people we are!

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You. You send angels and the heavenly host to encamp on every side, guarding Your church. We ask You to open our spiritual eyes, that we may be able to see spiritual things and know that You have always been guarding Your church. We ask You to bless the church I belong to, and also to raise up many coworkers who can frequently pray for the church, so that the church may be filled with spiritual light and walk on the road that accords with

Your heart; and so that it may become a place where the saints together serve You and testify for You. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.