Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal study only)
Numbers 23:13–26

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Praise the Lord that we can come together once again for our daily Bible reading. Today, we will continue our study of Numbers 23, focusing on verses 13 through 26.

King Balak brought Balaam to Kirjath Huzoth, to the high places where Baal was worshiped. From there, they could see the entire camp of Israel. Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites. So they built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. However, God did not appear to Balaam at the altars. Balaam then went alone to the top of a barren hill, where God appeared to him and put His words into Balaam's mouth. Balaam delivered his first blessing upon Israel in the form of a poem. The most significant part of this blessing was that Israel was a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations. This revealed that Israel had been set apart for God. Among all the nations of the earth, Israel held a unique position as God's chosen people, blessed by Him. Through Israel, all the nations of the earth would also receive blessings. Therefore, God promised to make them exceedingly fruitful and numerous, as countless as the dust of the earth. This was the very blessing God had promised to Israel's forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

When King Balak saw that Balaam could not curse Israel but instead pronounced blessings upon them, he was deeply displeased. After all, Balaam was a diviner whom he had summoned from the region of the Euphrates River. Perhaps, Balak thought, Balaam might still have another way to accomplish his purpose.

Verse 13: "Then Balak said to him, 'Please come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only the outer part of them, and shall not see them all; curse them for me from there.'"

Balak, the king of Moab, clearly did not know the LORD. Although the Moabites were descendants of Lot, they had completely turned away from God and followed the Canaanites in worshiping Baal. Balak assumed that the LORD, the God of Israel, was like the gods they worshiped—limited in power. He thought that perhaps Balaam had been intimidated by the sight of Israel's vast army and therefore did not dare to curse them. So Balak decided to take Balaam to another location where he could see only part of the Israelite camp rather than the entire nation. Perhaps then Balaam would be able to pronounce a curse. Most idols worshiped by people are products of human imagination. As a result, people often attribute human emotions, desires, and limitations to these idols. Balak may have thought that changing the location—and perhaps the spiritual atmosphere—would enable Balaam to curse Israel.

We must understand that the LORD, the God of Israel, is the Creator of heaven and earth and everything in the universe. He is the eternal God, unrestricted by time or space. What He speaks comes into existence; what He commands stands firm. Since He rules over all creation, how could any person, circumstance, or thing limit His power? Balak's actions were truly foolish and even laughable. Balaam, on the other hand, was a prophet driven by greed. Since Balak was the one offering him a generous reward, Balaam willingly went along with his arrangements.

Verse 14: "So he brought him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on *each* altar."

They went up to the top of Pisgah, one of the peaks associated with Mount Nebo. Looking westward from there, one could see a panoramic view of the land of Canaan. In Deuteronomy 34:1–5, shortly before Moses died, God brought him to the top of Pisgah and allowed him to see the entire Promised Land. Although Moses was not permitted to enter the good land of Canaan, God graciously allowed him to see it before his death, giving him the comfort of witnessing the fulfillment of God's promise from a distance.

Balak brought Balaam to the field of Zophim on the top of Pisgah. The name Zophim means "watchers," suggesting a lookout or observation point. From there, they could see only part of the Israelite camp. Once again, they built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. All of this was merely part of Balaam's elaborate performance. God paid no attention to these sacrifices. For sacrifices to be acceptable to God, they had to be offered according to the regulations He had revealed in Leviticus and through the priesthood He had established. From his previous experience, Balaam already knew that the LORD would not appear to him at the altars. Nevertheless, since the whole ceremony had been arranged, he had to continue playing his part. He went ahead with the sacrifices as usual, then stepped away before the ceremony was completed, perhaps hoping that the LORD would once again speak to him privately.

Verses 15–17: " And he said to Balak, 'Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet *the Lord* over there.' Then the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, 'Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak.' So he came to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab were with him. And Balak said to him, 'What has the Lord spoken?'"

Just as expected, Balaam left the altars and went off by himself. Once again, the LORD took the initiative to meet Balaam, putting His words into Balaam's mouth and instructing him to return to King Balak and pronounce a blessing upon Israel. Balaam then returned to the place where the burnt offerings had been made. King Balak and his officials were waiting eagerly, expecting Balaam to speak words of cursing against Israel. Balak asked Balaam what the LORD had said. He was still hoping that the change of location would finally enable Balaam to curse the Israelites.

Verses 18–19: "Then he took up his oracle and said: 'Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor! God *is* not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of

man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

Once again, Balaam delivered the words God had placed in his mouth in the form of a poem. He addressed Balak directly, calling him by name and identifying him as the son of Zippor, telling him to rise and listen carefully. Through Balaam, God spoke directly to King Balak. God is not a human being who lies, nor is He a son of man who changes His mind. Whatever God says, He will surely accomplish. Whatever He promises, He will certainly bring to fulfillment.

Verse 20: "Behold, I have received *a command* to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it"

Balaam had been commanded by God to bless Israel. Furthermore, God had already blessed the Israelites, and Balaam was powerless to change that. In other words, Balak's entire purpose in summoning Balaam from the region of the Euphrates River was to have him curse Israel, but this was simply impossible. Balaam could not curse those whom God had not cursed, nor could he reverse the blessings God had already given. No one can change what God has determined.

Israel was God's chosen people in the Old Testament, entrusted with a central role in His eternal plan of redemption. God chose Israel so that, through this nation, a greatly blessed woman would eventually come. She would conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Savior, Jesus Christ. Christ would bear the punishment for humanity's sins on the cross, paying the price with His own life. He would then rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and send the Holy Spirit. Everyone who believes in Christ would receive forgiveness of sins, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and eternal life.

Satan has used every possible scheme to undermine God's plan of redemption. Sihon, king of the Amorites; Og, king of Bashan; and now Balak, king of Moab, were all instruments used by Satan. Yet no one can reverse what God has blessed. What was true for Israel is also true for the New Testament church. In Ephesians 1:3–10, Paul explains that God has already blessed the church with every spiritual blessing.

For example, He chose us before the foundation of the world, redeemed us through the blood of Christ, and called us to be holy and without blame before Him. He also predestined us to receive adoption as His children. When the fullness of time comes, according to His divine arrangement, He will bring together all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. This is God's plan to unite all things in Christ.

God has already accomplished His plan of redemption through Israel. Now, through the New Testament church, He is carrying out His plan to unite all things in Christ. Both plans find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. God blessed Israel and accomplished His plan of redemption. Today, He continues to bless the church as He carries out His plan to bring all things together in Christ. No one can overturn what God has blessed. This is God's eternal will and the plan He established according to His eternal purpose.

Verse 21: "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The Lord his God *is* with him,"

This verse contains the central message of Balaam's second prophecy. God had not observed iniquity in Jacob or wickedness in Israel. This certainly does not mean that the Israelites had never sinned. Ever since leaving Egypt and entering the wilderness, they had repeatedly disobeyed God and rebelled against His commandments. In fact, the entire first generation of Israelites died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. Why, then, did God declare that He had not seen iniquity in Jacob or wickedness in Israel? It was because God had already revealed the regulations concerning sacrifices and established the priestly system. When the Israelites sinned, their sins could be covered through the sacrifices God had appointed.

Of course, in the Old Testament, these sacrifices were only a foreshadowing of what was to come. One day, God's Son, Jesus Christ, would come and personally bear the sins of humanity. God would no longer hold those sins against His people because the debt of sin had been fully paid. This is why God could declare that He saw no iniquity in Jacob and no wickedness in Israel. The same principle applies to

the New Testament church. The believers in the church have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and God has declared them righteous. In the same way, God no longer counts their sins against them.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we come together in the church, we must learn to see one another from God's perspective. Regardless of a fellow believer's past, once that person has received salvation through Jesus Christ, God has justified him or her. How, then, can we continue holding that person's past against them? Since God has already forgiven that person, we too must learn the lesson of forgiveness. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares in the NKJV, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." The LORD their God is with them, and the shout of a King is among them.

Through the sacrificial system, the sins and iniquities of the Israelites were covered, allowing God to dwell among them. Moses built the tabernacle according to the pattern God had shown him on the mountain, so that God could dwell in the midst of His people. Whenever the Israelites set up camp, the twelve tribes arranged themselves around the tabernacle. They enjoyed the joy and peace of God's presence, and the sound of praise could be heard throughout the camp. God would be their King, leading and governing them, and joyful shouts honoring their King would resound in every direction.

The same is true of the church today. When God has full authority in the church and personally governs and directs His people, the church will be filled with shouts of "Hallelujah!" as believers give glory and praise to the Lamb who sits upon the throne.

Verses 22–23: "God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox. 'For *there is* no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done !'"

It was God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and brought them to the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. They had defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. They were

victorious in battle after battle, possessing strength like that of a wild ox. Even the strongest enemies could not stand against them. There was no sorcery that could prevail against Jacob and no divination that could harm Israel. These words were directed specifically at King Balak. When Balak saw the tremendous strength of the Israelites, he became afraid and dared not confront them directly. Instead, he sought out Balaam, hoping to use sorcery and divination to bring harm upon Israel. But God placed His words directly into Balaam's mouth, declaring to Balak that neither sorcery nor divination would have any power against the Israelites.

Dear brothers and sisters, the same truth applies to believers under the New Covenant. Through His death on the cross, Jesus Christ has defeated the devil, who held the power of death. No evil spiritual power can stand against Jesus Christ. As long as we abide in Jesus Christ, no evil power can ultimately overcome us, and no work of an evil spirit can separate us from Him. Therefore, we should have nothing to do with fortune-telling or divination. Jesus Christ is already Lord over our lives. Every demonic power must flee before Him. No evil spirit or demon can snatch us out of Christ's hand. We can rest peacefully in the security and rest that God has prepared for us.

It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, "Oh, what God has done !" God protects Israel. Zechariah 2:8 describes His people as "the apple of His eye." Whoever harms God's people is touching what is precious to Him. Who would dare to act so recklessly? Paul tells us that we are members of the body of Jesus Christ. Who can separate us from Christ? God has indeed done great things for us. When Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He gave the church the mission of bearing witness to the nations. We are called to testify about the great things God has done in our lives so that His name may be glorified.

Peter gives us a very practical explanation of how we can glorify God. In 1 Peter 2:12, he urges believers to maintain honorable conduct among the Gentiles so that, even when others speak against them, their good works may lead those people to glorify God on the day of visitation.

Verse 24: "Look, a people rises like a lioness, And lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain."

Jacob once spoke blessings over his twelve sons, and those blessings became prophecies concerning the twelve tribes of Israel. When he spoke of Judah, he compared him to a lion. In Genesis 49:9, "Judah *is* a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? " When the Israelites traveled through the wilderness, the camp of Judah led the procession. They marched under the banner of Judah, which was associated with the image of a lion. In Balaam's prophecy, the entire army of Israel was compared to a lion. The people rise like a lioness and lift themselves up like a mighty lion. Their enemies would be terrified and flee before them. A lion does not lie down to rest until it has devoured its prey and drunk the blood of its victims. Likewise, Israel would not stop until victory was complete. Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, were both renowned for their military strength and fighting ability in the land of Canaan. Yet they had already fallen before Israel like prey before a lion. Who else would dare to wage war against the Israelites? God had placed His words into Balaam's mouth, and Balaam delivered to King Balak and his officials the message of how God would bless Israel.

Verse 25: "Then Balak said to Balaam, 'Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!"

When King Balak heard these words, he must have been filled with fear. He had hired Balaam as a diviner to curse the Israelites. Why, then, was Balaam now speaking in their favor? Balak must have been deeply frustrated and displeased. He essentially told Balaam, "If you cannot curse the Israelites, then at the very least, you should not bless them!" Balak was also reminding Balaam that he had summoned him from the region of the Euphrates River with the promise of great honor and generous rewards. In Balak's mind, Balaam was supposed to serve his interests and accomplish what he had been hired to do.

Verse 26: “So Balaam answered and said to Balak, ‘Did I not tell you, saying, ‘All that the Lord speaks, that I must do?’”

Deep in his heart, Balaam wanted to curse Israel. He was also eager to receive the reward King Balak had promised him. However, before the LORD God, he had no power to act according to his own desires. Balaam was a shrewd and calculating diviner. He had already warned Balak in advance that he could only speak what the LORD told him to speak. Now he used that earlier warning to avoid responsibility, saying, in effect, “Didn’t I already tell you that I must do whatever the LORD commands?”

Dear brothers and sisters, how complete and powerful is God’s protection over His people! Unless God permits it, who can harm us? This is why Paul boldly declares in Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” No matter what circumstances or storms we face, we can rest securely in the arms of God, because our God is greater than everything.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You. You have reminded us that no one can reverse the blessings You have given. You declared that You saw no iniquity in Jacob and no wickedness in Israel. In the same way, as believers under the New Covenant, our sins have been forgiven through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and we have been justified before You. You also promise to protect us as the apple of Your eye. What, then, do we have to fear? Dear Lord Jesus, please give me a peaceful and steadfast heart. May I draw strength and life from Your Word so that I can face the different circumstances, difficulties, and challenges that come my way. Help me to remember that You are faithful to Your promises and that You will continue to protect me until the very end. Lord, help me to rest in Your presence today. I pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.