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

Numbers 23: 27-24:05

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. Today we will read chapter 23 verse 27 to chapter 24 verse 5.

In order to curse the Israelites, Balak king of Moab summoned Balaam the diviner from the region by the Euphrates River. At that time, Balaam was a well-known diviner who could communicate with the spiritual realm. Whoever he blessed would be blessed, and whoever he cursed would be cursed. Balaam was not a prophet of the LORD, but he knew of the LORD. Therefore, King Balak came to Balaam and asked him to curse the Israelites. But God protected Israel as the apple of His eye, so He warned Balaam beforehand that he must not curse the Israelites. Then, while Balaam was on his way to Moab, God warned him once again through Balaam's donkey that he could speak only the words that the LORD told him to speak. These warnings left a deep impression on Balaam, so that he did not dare to disobey the LORD's command.

Of course, the LORD is greater than all idols and false gods. Even if Balaam had actually cursed the Israelites, his curse could not have overcome the blessing God had given them. But God wanted to do even more. He wanted a Gentile king such as Balak king of Moab to know how God protected Israel. God protected them to such an extent that Balaam could not even utter words of cursing; instead, every intended curse had to become a blessing. God does not allow anyone to use sorcery, evil spirits, or other supernatural powers to harm His chosen people.

The same is true of the New Testament church. Jesus Christ has destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Therefore, Satan cannot use the power of evil spirits to bring Christians into bondage, because every saint already has the indwelling Holy Spirit, who does not permit evil or unclean spirits to come and possess them.

After Balaam arrived in the land of Moab, he received a grand welcome from King Balak. Balak first took Balaam to Kirjath Huzoth. God put His word in Balaam's mouth, and Balaam spoke his first poetic blessing over Israel. The central statement of this first blessing was that Israel was "a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations." Balak then took Balaam up to Mount Pisgah. Once again, God put His word in Balaam's mouth, and Balaam spoke his second poetic blessing over Israel. The central statement was, "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel." Twice in succession, God turned the intended curse into a blessing. Yet King Balak still refused to give up.

Verse 27-28: "Then Balak said to Balaam, "Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that overlooks the wasteland."

King Balak was limited by his understanding of idol gods. He assumed that if they changed locations, the LORD God might no longer be effective. Balak's understanding of God was actually quite similar to that of many Chinese people. Chinese people worship many gods and may think, "My god is effective here, but not there." Therefore, Chinese people often place great importance on feng shui, considering the location, the direction, and even the proper time. In reality, these idol gods are products of human thought, arising from principles that people have formulated based on their past experiences. These principles may be connected with human customs, human habits, or people's limited and closed concepts. However, none of these are the true God. The LORD God is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. How could He possibly change simply because people move from one location to another?

Based on his own understanding, King Balak took Balaam to the top of Mount Peor. Looking down from the mountaintop, they could see the wilderness where the Israelites were encamped. The first time, King Balak had taken Balaam to Kirjath Huzoth, a large city by the Arnon River, which was quite far from where the Israelites were encamped. Balaam could see them from a distance, but not very

clearly. Yet Balaam blessed Israel, declaring that they would multiply greatly, like the dust of the earth, so that no one could even number one-fourth of Israel.

The second time, King Balak took Balaam to the top of Mount Pisgah, from where he could see only part of Israel's camp. Yet Balaam still blessed the Israelites, declaring that they had the strength of a wild ox and that no sorcery or divination could harm them. The third time, King Balak simply took Balaam to the top of Mount Peor. From there, Balaam could see at close range the wilderness where the Israelites were encamped, and he could see the entire camp. Perhaps this time, Balaam would finally be able to curse the Israelites.

Verse 29-30: "Then Balaam said to Balak, 'Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams.' And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on every altar."

Balaam followed the same procedure as before. Once again, he told King Balak to build seven altars and prepare seven bulls and seven rams. Balak then offered one bull and one ram on each altar. In reality, Balaam knew in his heart that God paid no attention at all to their sacrifices. Therefore, all this elaborate preparation of building altars and offering sacrifices was merely a performance for King Balak to see. On the previous two occasions, Balaam had still followed his usual practices, using certain occult methods to communicate with the spiritual realm in an attempt to curse Israel. But each time, God took the initiative to put His words into Balaam's mouth, so that Balaam could speak only words of blessing.

Verse 24: 01-02: "Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him."

Since Balaam knew that God was determined to bless the Israelites, he no longer resorted to sorcery, because he knew it was completely useless. This time, Balaam simply turned his face toward the wilderness. There he saw the twelve tribes of Israel arranged in an orderly manner around the Tabernacle. At that very moment, the Spirit of God suddenly came upon Balaam.

On the previous two occasions, God had put His words into Balaam's mouth. In those instances, only Balaam's mouth was used by God. But this time it was different. The Spirit of God came upon Balaam, causing his entire being to be used by God. For Balaam, this was a further and deeper experience, and it brought forth an even broader and more transcendent blessing upon Israel. Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps you may think that Balaam was truly blessed to have such a profound experience. Indeed, for a Gentile prophet to have the Spirit of God come upon him, enabling him for a brief time to experience God using his entire being to speak words of blessing, was a rare and precious experience.

However, the New Testament saints are far more blessed than Balaam. Every person who has received grace and salvation has the indwelling Holy Spirit. If we are willing to walk according to the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to rule and have authority over us, not only can our entire being be used by God, but the Holy Spirit will also leave transforming marks upon our soul. In fact, this is the process of sanctification in every believer. In this process, the Holy Spirit changes the way we think, changes the inclinations of our emotions, and changes the choices of our will, causing our entire being to become more like Jesus Christ. The result of these changes is that the fruit of the Spirit is produced in our soul: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Verse 24: 03-04: "Then he took up his oracle and said: 'The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, The utterance of him who hears the words of God, Who sees the vision of the Almighty, Who falls down, with eyes wide open.'"

This was Balaam's third prophecy and also his final blessing upon Israel. What distinguished this blessing from the previous two was Balaam's own experience. On the first two occasions, God put His words into Balaam's mouth, and his mouth became an instrument used by God. His soul—or, more specifically, his mind, emotion, and will—did not participate. Therefore, although his mouth spoke words of blessing over Israel, Balaam himself did not understand why God wanted to bless Israel.

This time, however, the Spirit of God came upon him, passed through his soul, and then used his mouth to speak words of blessing over Israel. In other words, the Holy Spirit placed the intent to bless Israel into his heart. Balaam then had to use his mind to form a thought according to the intent that came from the Holy Spirit, and finally use his mouth to express that thought. This is also what Hebrews 4:12 tells us concerning how the spirit directs the soul: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

In this verse, the writer of Hebrews compares the soul to the joints and to the thoughts, while the spirit is compared to the marrow and to the intents. The marrow is contained within the joints, just as intent is contained within thought, and just as the spirit is contained within the soul. When the Spirit of God directs the human soul, the Spirit of God places an intent within the person's soul. The thoughts within the human soul then begin to operate according to that intent. Through the participation of the soul, the person is able to understand why the Spirit of God desires to do something in a particular way.

It was not until this third occasion that Balaam understood why God was determined to bless Israel. Therefore, in these two verses, Balaam first described his own condition and the change that had taken place within him. "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, The utterance of the man whose eyes are closed." This is the poetic style Balaam consistently used, with one line corresponding to the other. Balaam the son of Beor is the very man whose eyes were closed. Balaam described himself as a man whose eyes were closed. But here we encounter a

question. If we look at the Chinese Union Version, there is a note after the word "closed," saying that it may also be translated "opened." Yet "closed" and "opened" are completely opposite concepts. How could they come from the same Hebrew word?

If we refer to English translations, among three commonly used versions—the NIV, KJV, and ASV—the NIV and KJV translate the word as "open," while the ASV translates it as "closed." Thus, there are two completely different ways of translating the word. The Chinese Union Version translates it as "closed" but adds a note saying that it may also be translated "opened." So, should it be "closed" or "opened"? Let us try to understand the reason for this difference.

Balaam used a very unusual Hebrew word here. It occurs only twice in the entire Old Testament, both times in this chapter, and only Balaam uses it—in verses 3 and 4. The Hebrew word is *shatham*. Some versions translate it as "opened" because verse 4 speaks of "the one who falls down, with eyes wide open." This statement also describes Balaam. The Hebrew word translated "open" here is a commonly used word. Since verses 3 and 4 correspond with each other, some versions therefore translate the word in verse 3 as "open."

Why, then, do some versions translate it as "closed"? In Lamentations 3:8, we read, "He shuts out my prayer." More literally, we could say, "He closes off my prayer." The Hebrew word for "shuts" or "closes" is *satham*, which is a commonly used Hebrew word meaning "to close" or "to shut." This word is very similar to the word Balaam used, and therefore some versions translate Balaam's word as "closed."

Personally, I prefer the translation "closed." Balaam may very well have meant that God had closed his physical eyes. When his physical eyes were open, all he could see was earthly honor and wealth, and because of this, he could not see God. Now God had closed his physical eyes, enabling him to follow the leading of the Spirit of God and begin to understand the words of God. At the same time, his spiritual eyes were opened, and he saw the vision of the Almighty. Here, "the Almighty" refers to the God of Israel—the LORD. He became a man whose eyes were opened. This

refers to his spiritual eyes being opened so that he could see the vision of God. His response was immediate: he fell to the ground.

When Saul was on the road to Damascus to arrest those who believed in Jesus, he saw a great light. Acts 9:4 records, “Then he fell to the ground.” When the apostle John was on the island of Patmos on the Lord’s Day, he was in the Spirit. He heard a voice and then saw the glorious Son of Man. Revelation 1:17 says, “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.”

Whenever people see the manifestation of the glorious God, their response is to fall to the ground. Balaam responded in the same way—he immediately fell to the ground. Only a person who falls down before God can see God’s revelation. If someone considers himself to be great, his physical eyes may be open, but his spiritual eyes are closed. Such a person cannot see the vision of God.

Verse 24:5: “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!”

This verse is the central point of Balaam’s third prophecy. God allowed him to see just how beautiful God’s chosen people, Israel, were. Therefore, he could not help but declare: “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!”

Jacob is Israel. However, for Jacob to become Israel, he had to go through a process. Jacob was born as one who liked to grasp and strive for things. He and his brother Esau were twins. Jacob wanted to be born first so that he could obtain the birthright of the firstborn. However, his brother Esau was physically stronger than he was, so Esau was born first. Jacob was unwilling to give up, so he came out holding onto his brother’s heel. When his parents saw this, they named him Jacob, which carries the meaning of grasping. Throughout his life, Jacob continually struggled to obtain things for himself. He bought Esau’s birthright with a bowl of red stew, and later used deception to obtain the blessing of the firstborn. When Esau discovered what had happened, he wanted to kill Jacob, so Jacob had no choice but to flee to Padan Aram for refuge. There, God prepared someone who was even better at grasping than Jacob was. God used Laban to teach Jacob the lesson of looking to God.

Jacob remained in Padan Aram for twenty years and learned many lessons. Eventually, God blessed Jacob and enabled him to return to the land of Canaan with his wives, children, and great wealth. When Jacob came to the ford of the Jabbok, God Himself came and wrestled with him. God then changed Jacob's name to Israel, meaning "prince of God." This was the most important turning point in Jacob's life. He named that place Peniel because there he had seen the face of God. He was transformed from Jacob, a man who continually stretched out his hands to grasp things for himself, into Israel, a man who stretched out his hands to bless others.

"How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!" When Balaam saw the twelve tribes of Israel encamped around the Tabernacle, what he first saw were the physical descendants of Jacob. They all lived in tents. They had truly received God's blessing, and therefore their tents were exceedingly lovely. "Your dwellings, O Israel!" The name Israel emphasizes that Jacob's twelve sons had become the twelve tribes of Israel. "Israel" declares that they were God's chosen people. This present generation of Israelites was a new generation through whom God would fulfill the promises He had given to their forefathers. They were a people who belonged to God, and God's Tabernacle was in their midst. Balaam saw that God was with the Israelites and that Israel had become a testimony expressing God. Therefore, he praised the dwellings of Israel for their beauty.

Balaam now had an entirely new vision. He saw God's intention concerning the Israelites and began to praise the descendants of Jacob for being blessed by God and becoming Israel, God's chosen people. How beautiful was their expression, and how glorious was their testimony!

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that we will have the same vision when we look at the saints around us. Every saint has been chosen by God and has become one of God's people. Every saint can express God and can also be transformed to become God's testimony. How beautiful and how glorious this is! As Psalm 133:1–3 says: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is. For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew

of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing—Life forevermore."

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, help us to see that we are truly far more blessed than Balaam. When the Spirit of God came upon him and his spiritual eyes were opened, he was able to see that God's heart was set upon Israel and how beautiful the Israelites were. Today, we all have the indwelling Holy Spirit. Help us to become those who walk according to the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit, may we see that the church is God's heart's desire, and may we see how precious, how beautiful, and how glorious every saint in the church is. May God bless the church where we are, so that the brothers and sisters may dwell together in unity and together express the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ. Bless the church where we are. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.