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

**Numbers 24: 10-13**

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 24. Today, we are reading verses 10 through 13.

The Gentile prophet Balaam was brought to the land of Moab by Balak, king of Moab, with the promise of great honor and reward. The purpose was to curse the Israelites. The Israelites were completely unaware of this, but God was secretly protecting them. God used Balaam's mouth to speak words of blessing concerning Israel to King Balak, and these prophecies were spoken in the form of poetry.

These prophecies have already been fulfilled for the Israelites, and they are also being fulfilled for the New Testament church. All three prophecies were presented in poetic form, so there is greater room for interpretation. However, one thing is certain: each prophecy has a central theme.

The theme of the first prophecy is found in Numbers 23:9, "A people dwelling alone, Not reckoning itself among the nations." This speaks of the position of God's chosen people. They have been separated unto God and therefore are not counted among the nations. This was true of the Israelites in the Old Testament, and it is also true of the New Testament church. The Israelites were chosen by God from among all the nations. Likewise, the New Testament church was also chosen by God from among all the nations. Therefore, in God's eyes, there are three groups of people: the Israelites, the church, and the nations.

The Israelites were separated by God in order to accomplish His plan of redemption. The New Testament church stands upon the foundation of the plan of redemption. That is to say, every member of the church has already received the salvation of Jesus Christ. The New Testament saints have also been separated by God in order to accomplish His plan of heading up all things in Christ.

At the end of the age, when Christ returns, these three groups of people will also have different outcomes. The remaining Israelites will all be sealed and preserved by God. The New Testament church will be raptured to the judgment seat of Christ, and each person will receive a reward according to what he has done. The nations on earth will be gathered before the throne of Christ's glory and divided into the righteous and the wicked according to how they have treated God's chosen people. The first characteristic of God's chosen people is that they are a people dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations. This emphasizes their position as those who have been separated unto God.

The theme of the second prophecy is found in Numbers 23:21, "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel." This speaks of the nature of God's chosen people as holy, so that God sees no iniquity or wickedness. This does not mean that God's chosen people do not sin, but rather that God has prepared a way of redemption for His chosen people. In the Old Testament, the Israelites could have their sins covered through the priestly system, by having sacrificial animals offered on the altar on their behalf. Both the high priest and the sacrificial animals pointed to Christ.

The Word became flesh. Christ came to the earth and offered Himself once for all, accomplishing God's plan of redemption, so that everyone who receives Christ's salvation can be justified by God. Therefore, God sees only the precious blood of redemption and no longer sees iniquity or wickedness. Thus, the New Testament saints should strive to live a holy life and, through confession of sins and applying the precious blood of Christ, receive forgiveness of sins, so that they may become holy in nature.

The theme of the third prophecy is found in Numbers 24:5, "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!" This speaks of the expression of God's chosen people. How greatly God desires to dwell with His chosen people! The twelve tribes of Israel camped around the tabernacle, displaying how beautiful the tents of Jacob were. The tabernacle became the center of the Israelites' living and work. God dwelt in the tabernacle, manifesting its splendor.

In the New Testament, the church is the house of God. How good and how pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity! In God's house, brothers and sisters love one another, allowing others to see that God is with them. The New Testament church life should manifest the beauty and glory of God's house. We can see that Balaam's prophecies have a progression: first, separation in position; next, becoming holy in nature; and finally, beauty and glory in expression. Dear brothers and sisters, these are actually the three characteristics that the church must possess.

Therefore, we need to examine our own church and ask three key questions. First, has the church been separated from the world and consecrated unto God? Second, is the nature of the church holy? Has it been delivered from sin, the world, and the flesh? Third, is the expression of the church life filled with heavenly beauty and divine glory? May God remember and preserve every church, so that each may become a glorious testimony of God in its locality.

**Verse 10: "Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, 'I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times!'"**

King Balak had brought Balaam from the distant region by the great river for the purpose of cursing his enemy, Israel. Instead, Balaam blessed the Israelites three times, and the content of the blessings became increasingly rich and increasingly transcendent. King Balak could no longer contain himself. He became furious and struck his hands together. He was not clapping his hands in happiness, but was beside himself with anger and had nowhere to vent it. If he had been indoors, he surely would have pounded the table loudly. But now he was outdoors, facing the wilderness where the Israelites were encamped, so he could only strike his hands together to vent his anger.

**Verse 11: "Now therefore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the LORD has kept you back from honor."**

Since Balaam could not curse the Israelites, King Balak wanted to send him away as quickly as possible. He said to him, I intended to give you great honor, but the LORD has prevented you from receiving that honor. King Balak could also see that Balaam truly wanted to curse the Israelites in order to receive a rich reward. Balak also realized that it was the LORD who would not allow Balaam to curse the Israelites. In this matter, Balaam was completely powerless.

King Balak was stating the facts. From the very beginning, their relationship had been a transaction: King Balak would pay a reward to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites. Now that Balaam could not curse the Israelites, King Balak naturally would not pay him. King Balak told Balaam directly that it was the LORD who had prevented him from receiving his reward.

Dear brothers and sisters, Balaam's experience is actually something the saints often have to face. We all desire to obtain honor and rich rewards in this world. If such honor and rewards are not according to God's heart's desire, how would you choose? In Balaam's situation, God prevented him from receiving honor. If you were Balaam, would you become resentful? Or suppose God took a step back and gave you the freedom to choose. Would you do something contrary to God's heart's desire for the sake of honor and reward?

Actually, we face such choices every day. On one side is God's best will, and on the other side are the wealth, fame, and power of the world. These two sides are not necessarily incompatible, but in most situations they stand in contrast to each other. Perhaps you would say that you do not know what God's best will is. Actually, there is a very simple way to test it: if your conscience feels absolutely no sense of wrongdoing, this is usually God's best will.

In the process of a Christian's growth in life, these two sides are almost always in opposition at the beginning. If we are willing to choose God's best will and give up wealth, fame, and power that are readily within our reach, it is just as Matthew 6:19-21 says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and

rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. " When we are willing to lay up treasures in heaven, our hearts will also be in heaven.

When we have exercised ourselves in this way to the point that we can overcome the temptations and enticements of the world, perhaps under God's sovereign authority, God will allow us to handle much earthly wealth, because God knows that we can properly manage and use these riches to help those in need or support spiritual ministries. A person who would indulge himself upon obtaining wealth will be preserved by God in poverty. A person who would become arrogant upon obtaining power will be preserved by God in an ordinary position. A person who would boast upon obtaining fame will be preserved by God in obscurity.

Actually, the highest condition a Christian can attain is what Paul describes in Philippians 4:11-13, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Even the great apostle Paul needed to learn in the circumstances God had measured out to him before he could be content in every situation and do all things. How much more do we need to rest in the circumstances God has prepared for us and learn the lesson of contentment! Perhaps one day we too will be able to declare: I can do all things.

**Verses 12-13: "So Balaam said to Balak, 'Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak'?"**

What Balaam said was also quite reasonable. From the very beginning, he had made the unfavorable conditions clear. However, his words sounded more like a disclaimer of responsibility, because when God first came to Balaam, in Numbers 22:12, He had already told him, “You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.” Since God had already forbidden him, he should have declined King Balak’s invitation.

Balaam truly wanted to go in his heart, but he also knew that he might not be able to meet King Balak’s expectations. Therefore, he said that even if King Balak gave him a house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the command of the LORD and speak good or bad according to his own will. Whatever the LORD wanted him to say, that was what he would say.

Nevertheless, Balaam still entertained the hope that perhaps, by making a great effort to please the LORD, he could change the LORD’s mind. Therefore, he built seven altars, offered seven bulls, and also offered seven rams. The LORD is the God who searches the human heart. Of course, the LORD knew Balaam’s thoughts. That was why, on the road, He spoke to Balaam through Balaam’s donkey and sternly warned him that he could speak only the words God wanted him to speak.

Now everything was finished, and the matter had been settled. King Balak furiously blamed Balaam, while Balaam had also prepared a set of explanations that made him appear to be a prophet of noble character. Of course, Balaam’s story was not yet over. Next week we will continue reading about Balaam’s deeds.

Dear brothers and sisters, although Balaam was a Gentile prophet, his struggle between obeying God and obtaining worldly honor is something the saints also frequently encounter. More often than not, God gives us greater freedom than He gave Balaam. God does not prevent us from acting, but allows the Holy Spirit within us to issue a still, small voice to warn us. Do we continue doing things our own way, or will we stop and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit?

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, You know our condition, and You also know our struggles. Too often, we hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, yet we cannot let go of earthly honor and rich rewards, so that we are not always able to walk in God's best will. May God help us and grant us a contented heart, allowing us to rest in our circumstances, knowing that everything God has prepared for us is the very best. Open our spiritual eyes so that we may see how rich and glorious the inheritance God has prepared for us in heaven is, far surpassing anything we can experience or enjoy on earth. Grant us a heavenly vision, so that we may be willing to lay up treasures in heaven. Bless my daily living. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.