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

Numbers 24:14-25

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we will be reading the Book of Numbers, from 24:14 through the end of chapter 25. Today, we will read Numbers 24:14–25.

Balak, the king of Moab, became fearful because the Israelites were growing strong. Although the Israelites had obeyed the LORD's command and taken a detour through the land of Moab to attack Sihon, king of the Amorites, fear caused King Balak to regard friends as enemies. Balaam, a Gentile prophet known for his occult practices, loved money and fame, so he accepted King Balak's invitation to go to the land of Moab and curse the Israelites. These two men came together for their own benefit, each seeking what he wanted from the other. In the world ruled by Satan, this is simply an ordinary business transaction. Even today, such transactions frequently occur in political relations between nations and in business dealings between companies. But when such transactions involve God's chosen people, God intervenes.

Balaam tried three times to curse the Israelites, but through God's intervention, his attempts became three blessings upon them. In Balaam's blessings, we see that the Israelites' position was one of separation unto God; their nature was holy, and God saw no iniquity or wickedness in them; and their outward appearance was beautiful and glorious. In particular, when Balaam delivered his third prophetic blessing, the Spirit of God came upon him. This was also a completely new experience for Balaam. Not only did he see that God had already blessed Israel, but he also saw the fate of the surrounding nations. When King Balak of Moab saw that Balaam could not curse Israel but instead blessed them, he became furious and wanted to send Balaam back to his own country, the land of Aram beside the River Euphrates.

Verses 14–16: "'And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days.' So 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, and has the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open:'"

Balaam wanted to obtain honor and rewards from King Balak, but the LORD God would not permit it. With no other choice, he had to take his leave of King Balak. Before departing, however, he made one final attempt, hoping that there might still be a small chance for things to turn around. He told King Balak, "I will tell you what the Israelites will do to your people." I believe Balaam was acting out of his own selfish motives, but God permitted it. God intended to use a Gentile prophet to foretell the plan of redemption that He had already ordained from eternity. This laid an important foundation for the salvation of the Gentiles by grace.

Verses 15 and 16 go on to describe how Balaam himself heard the words of God and saw His visions. These two verses are almost word for word identical to verses 3 and 4 earlier, except that the phrase "and has the knowledge of the Most High" is added. This tells us that the Spirit of God had come upon Balaam and opened his spiritual eyes, enabling him to hear God's words, understand His will, and see His visions, causing him to fall before God. This was God's will: Balaam was to declare the fate of the nations.

What is particularly interesting is that Moses himself knew nothing about the transaction between Balaam and King Balak, nor did he participate in it. How, then, did the details of their dealings come to be recorded in the Pentateuch? Most likely, Balaam's prophecies had already spread among the Moabites and several other peoples, causing the nations near the land of Canaan to fear the Israelites. Moses probably learned these details later from the Moabites and Midianites and recorded them in the Pentateuch.

Verse 17: "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult."

This is the central verse among Balaam's prophecies concerning the surrounding nations. Therefore, we need to spend a little more time examining it.

"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near." These words tell us that the vision Balaam saw concerned events that would not take place at that time but would occur in the future. Thus, it is clearly a prophecy. The vision Balaam saw was probably somewhat indistinct. God showed him a general outline containing only the major events, without describing the details. Consequently, the fulfillment of this kind of vision allows considerable flexibility in interpretation. Generally speaking, prophecies often have multiple levels of fulfillment. The nearer fulfillment largely concerns events involving the Israelites, while the more distant fulfillment points to Christ and the New Testament church.

"A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." A star often represents a king, while a scepter represents a king's authority. Taken directly, these two prophetic statements mean that a great King would arise from the house of Jacob and establish royal authority and a kingdom from among Israel. This King would 'batter the brow of Moab,' meaning that He would conquer the entire land of Moab, and would 'destroy all the sons of tumult.' The expression 'sons of tumult' is translated in the KJV as 'the children of Sheth.' The term 'Sheth' here refers to the Moabites.

The Moabites liked to gather together, make a commotion, and stir up trouble. Jeremiah 48:45 also describes the fate of Moab, saying that fire would "devour the brow of Moab and the crown of the head of the sons of tumult." The Moabites were loud and troublesome, always stirring up strife, yet they could not ultimately accomplish anything of lasting significance. The near-term fulfillment of these two prophetic statements was the establishment of a powerful kingdom of Israel under King David. In 2 Samuel 8:2, we see that David defeated the Moabites: "So the Moabites became David's servants."

The more distant fulfillment of “A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel” points to Christ. About 1,500 years later, both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel had fallen. During the era of the Roman Empire, Caesar Augustus was in power. He appointed Herod as ruler over the land of Canaan. At that time, several wise men came from the East to Jerusalem. Matthew 2:2 records their words, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

Most Bible commentators believe that these wise men came from Persia, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. They probably knew from Balaam’s prophecy that a Star would arise out of Jacob. Therefore, they observed the stars at night, saw the Star of Jacob, and traveled a great distance to Jerusalem to worship the King of the Jews. Of course, this King of the Jews was the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the virgin Mary and born into the world.

When Jesus Christ came to earth, His purpose was not to establish an earthly kingdom but to establish the kingdom of heaven. The citizens of the kingdom of heaven are different from the citizens of earthly kingdoms. They must possess eight characteristics—or, perhaps more accurately, receive eight special blessings. These are recorded in Matthew 5:3–8. When Christ first came to earth, He came to seek and save the people of the kingdom of heaven, bringing them into blessing. They would become the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. These are the eight characteristics that the citizens of the kingdom of heaven must possess.

After Christ completed His redemptive work, He rose from the dead three days later. Before ascending to heaven, He also promised His disciples that He would return to establish His kingdom. At that time, the prophecy that a Scepter would rise out of Israel would be fulfilled. Christ will return with an iron scepter to rule over the nations, and He has promised that the saints will reign with Him. Revelation 2:26–27 says, “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels—as I also have received from My Father.”

Dear brothers and sisters, God revealed through the mouth of a Gentile prophet the destiny of the world and the glory of His chosen people. He did this so that we Gentiles who have received His grace might see that salvation is intended for all peoples, and the glory of reigning with the Lord is also intended for all peoples. The conditions we must meet are to receive salvation, submit to authority, and live lives that are pleasing to God.

Verses 18–19: "And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly. Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, and destroy the remains of the city."

These two verses concern the Edomites. The Edomites were descendants of Esau and originally lived in Mount Seir, which was southwest of the land of Moab. The King who would arise from Jacob and exercise dominion, mentioned here, has both a near-term and a distant fulfillment, just as in the previous verse. The near-term fulfillment also refers to King David. Second Samuel 8:14 says, "All the Edomites became David's servants."

Later, when the southern kingdom of Judah suffered disaster and the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, the Edomites not only stood by and gloated over their misfortune but also took advantage of their suffering. The prophet Obadiah rebuked the Edomites and prophesied in Obadiah 1:15, "For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head." Obadiah 1:21 says, "Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's." The more distant fulfillment awaits the second coming of Christ, when He establishes His kingdom on earth. At that time, the Edomites and their territory in Mount Seir will belong to Christ, who will reign over all.

Verse 20: "Then he looked on Amalek, and he took up his oracle and said: 'Amalek was first among the nations, but shall be last until he perishes.'"

This verse describes the fate of the Amalekites. The Amalekites were a clan descended from Esau. Their ancestor is mentioned in Genesis 36:12, Eliphaz, Esau's eldest son, had Amalek through his concubine. The Amalekites originally lived in the region of Mount Seir. Later, they left Edom, occupied the southern borderland of Canaan, and settled in the valleys. As the Amalekites gradually grew stronger, they became the first nation to attack the Israelites. Thus, Amalek became "first among the nations," but he would ultimately perish. First Samuel 15:7–9 records how King Saul defeated the Amalekites and "also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive." The kingdom of Amalek was eventually destroyed.

Verses 21–22: "Then he looked on the Kenites, and he took up his oracle and said: 'Firm is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock; nevertheless Kain shall be burned. How long until Asshur carries you away captive?'"

The Kenites were a clan among the Midianites, and Moses' brother-in-law belonged to the Kenites. The Kenites maintained friendly relations with the Israelites. Judges 1:16 records that the Kenites lived with the people of Judah in the wilderness of Judah. Judges 4:17–22 records how Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, helped the Israelites kill Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite king's army.

Because the Kenites were allied with the Israelites, their dwelling place was secure. They lived southwest of the Dead Sea, next to the Amalekites. There were many rocky caves in that region, and they built their nests in the rocks. This continued until the Assyrian Empire arose. In 722 BC, Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. Later, the Babylonian Empire rose and destroyed the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC. The Assyrians and Babylonians were both associated with the Chaldean peoples. When the Israelites disobeyed God's authority and rebelled against Him, God raised up Assyria and Babylon to destroy Israel, and the Kenites were also taken captive along with them.

Verse 23: “Then he took up his oracle and said: ‘Alas! Who shall live when God does this?’”

Balaam delivered his prophecies in the form of poetic oracles. He described the fate of the nations surrounding Israel, beginning with the Moabites, then the Edomites, the Amalekites, and the Kenites. It seems that he proceeded clockwise, describing the fate of each nation according to its geographical location. At this point, Balaam could not help but exclaim, “‘Alas! Who shall live when God does this?’” He recognized that this was entirely God’s work and that the outcome had already been determined by God. No one could change it. Yet Balaam himself still stood in the position of a Gentile outside God’s people. Therefore, he lamented, “Alas!” In other words, how terrible the outcome would be! He saw that God was directing the course of human history, yet he himself was not one of God’s people. Although the Spirit of God had come upon him, he had not been transformed. He remained an unbelieving Gentile, and therefore his ultimate fate was tragic.

Nearly a thousand years later, God used another prophet named Daniel, who belonged to God. Although he had been taken captive to Babylon, he continued to strive to live a godly life. God showed Daniel a remarkable vision, extending from the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire, then to the Greek Empire, then to the Roman Empire, and finally to the end of the world. From the perspective of world affairs, Daniel’s prophecy seems to continue where Balaam’s prophecy left off. The difference, however, is that Daniel saw a glorious outcome. Daniel 12:13 says, “But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.”

Dear brothers and sisters, when we compare Balaam and Daniel, we see that the issue was not the visions themselves. Both men saw visions, and both saw that the history of the world was in God’s hands. Yet their ultimate destinies were entirely different. Therefore, what truly matters is whether we ourselves are aligned with God. That is what determines the kind of outcome we will have.

Verse 24: "But ships shall come from the coasts of Kittim, and they shall afflict Asshur and afflict Eber, and so shall Amalek come to destruction."

This is Balaam's final prophecy. Who were the people of Kittim? In Genesis 10:4, we see that Kittim was a son of Javan and a grandson of Japheth. The people of Kittim originally lived on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. They were a maritime people, and around 1200 BC, they came to the land of Canaan and settled along the coast, becoming the Philistines. The Philistines frequently invaded the Assyrians to the north and the Hebrews to the east. Thus, they afflicted both Asshur and Eber, becoming a scourge to the inhabitants of Canaan. Later, the Philistines were conquered and assimilated by the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires, and they eventually disappeared from history.

Verse 25: "So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way."

After Balaam finished delivering his prophecies in poetic form, he returned to his own country, the region beside the River Euphrates. King Balak also went back to his own place. Was this the end of Balaam's story? No. Tomorrow, we will continue to examine the harm that Balaam caused. Balaam had received tremendous grace. He had heard about the future destiny of Israel and the surrounding nations. Yet he himself had not been changed. As he had declared, his ultimate fate was tragic. We Gentiles, however, have a far better destiny than Balaam.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Through Balaam's prophecy, we see that "a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." Through the grace of redemption in Jesus Christ, we can become God's chosen people under the New Covenant through faith. What an immense blessing this is! If we continue to experience the grace of Jesus Christ and live lives that are pleasing to God, then when Christ returns and the prophecy "a Scepter shall rise out of Israel" is fulfilled, we will be able to reign with Christ. What a tremendous promise this is! Bless our daily lives and help us receive the eight blessings of the citizens of the kingdom of

heaven. May the church to which I belong manifest the reality of the kingdom's citizens even today. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.