

November 29, 2020

Balaam's Prophecies and Legacy

Numbers 23-25

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Nov 22 Acts 24-26	Nov 26 Romans 8-10
Nov 23 Acts 27-28	Nov 27 Romans 11-13
Nov 24 Romans 1-3	Nov 28 Romans 14-16
Nov 25 Romans 4-7	Nov 29 1 Cor 1-4

Lesson Idea: God speaks blessings over His people instead of curses, and He accomplishes His desires.

Background:

Last week we looked at the story of Balaam and his talking donkey. King Balak of Moab had decided to try to hire the prophet to curse Israel, but God commanded him not to curse those whom the Lord had blessed.

This week we will focus on chapters 23-24 and examine some of Balaam's prophecies about Israel. This is a lot of material to cover during a Sunday School lesson, so I encourage you not to get bogged down in a word by word study. If you read the chapters as a whole, you will begin to notice some interesting themes in Balaam's prophecies. Each of his prophetic messages emphasize important truths about God and His people. One of his prophecies even contained information that foretold about the birth of Jesus.

We will also look at Numbers 25 and some other biblical references to see how Balaam later influenced Israel and the legacy he left behind. The New Testament judges him harshly as someone who loved money more than the message of the Lord. It warns us not to follow His example. Although Balaam heard the word of the Lord, he did not love the Lord wholeheartedly nor follow God's will.

Foundational Truths

- **When God chooses to bless or curse, no one can undo it or revoke it.**
- **"God is not a man, that He would lie, Nor a son of man, that He would change His mind." If God decides to do something, He will accomplish it.**
- **It's not enough to just know the words of God, we must embrace His will.**

Numbers 23:1-30 Balaam's First Two Prophecies

Questions to Ponder:

- **V 1-6. Why did God speak to Balaam?**
- **V 7-12. What did Balaam's first prophecy say about Israel and about God?**
- **V 19. What important truth about God did Balaam share in this second prophecy?**

- **V 20-24. Why did Balaam utter a blessing and not a curse on Israel?**
- **V 25-30. How did Balak respond to Balaam's first two messages?**

Numbers 23:1-30

1 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me here." 2 Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on each altar. 3 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand beside your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the Lord will come to meet me, and **whatever He shows me I will tell you.**" So he went to a bare hill.

4 Now **God met with Balaam,** and he said to Him, "I have set up the seven altars, and I have offered up a bull and a ram on each altar." 5 Then **the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth** and said, "Return to Balak, and this is what you shall speak." 6 So he returned to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, he and all the leaders of Moab. 7 And he took up his discourse and said,

"From Aram Balak has brought me,
Moab's king from the mountains of the East, saying,
'Come, declare Jacob cursed for me,
And come, curse Israel!'

8 How am I to put a curse on him upon whom God has not put a curse?

And how am I to curse him whom the Lord has not cursed?

9 For I see him from the top of the rocks,
And I look at him from the hills;
Behold, a people that lives in isolation,
And does not consider itself to be among the nations.

10 Who has counted the dust of Jacob,
Or the number of the fourth part of Israel?

**May I die the death of the upright,
And may my end be like his!**"

11 Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to put a curse on my enemies, but behold, **you have actually blessed them!**" 12 He replied, "Must I not be careful to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?"

13 Then Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from where you may see them, although you will only see the extreme end of them and will not see all of them; and put a curse on them for me from there." 14 So he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and he built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. 15 Then he said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offering while I myself meet the Lord over there." 16 Then **the Lord met Balaam and put a word in his mouth,** and said, "Return to Balak, and this is what you shall speak." 17 So he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, and the leaders of Moab with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the Lord spoken?" 18 Then he took up his discourse and said,

"Arise, Balak, and hear;
Listen to me, son of Zippor!

19 God is not a man, that He would lie,

**Nor a son of man, that He would change His mind;
Has He said, and will He not do it?**

Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

20 Behold, I have received a command to bless;

When He has blessed, I cannot revoke it.

21 He has not looked at misfortune in Jacob;

Nor has He seen trouble in Israel;

The Lord his God is with him,

And the joyful shout of a king is among them.

22 God brings them out of Egypt,

He is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

23 For there is no magic curse against Jacob,

Nor is there any divination against Israel;

At the proper time it shall be said to Jacob

And to Israel, what God has done!

24 Behold, a people rises like a lioness,

And like a lion it raises itself;

It will not lie down until it devours the prey,

And drinks the blood of those slain."

25 Then Balak said to Balaam, **"Do not curse them at all nor bless them at all!"** 26 But Balaam replied to Balak, **"Did I not tell you, 'Whatever the Lord speaks, I must do'?"**

27 Then Balak said to Balaam, **"Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will be agreeable with God that you curse them for me from there."** 28 So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, which overlooks the desert. 29 And Balaam said to Balak, **"Build seven altars for me here and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me here."** 30 Balak did just as Balaam had said, and offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.

Notes:

- **V 1-6. Why did God speak to Balaam?**

Balaam did the right things when he wanted to hear from God—he prepared altars and offered sacrifices and then went to *"meet with God"* (v 3). He promised to share only what God told him to say. But God did not speak to Balaam because of all the things Balaam did; God spoke because He wanted His will to be known. God reveals Himself according to His desires. He wanted both Balaam and Balak to know that He is the Lord over all and that He will bless whom He wants to bless and only curse whom He desires to curse. Balaam acknowledged that in verse 8 when he said: ***How am I to put a curse on him upon whom God has not put a curse? And how am I to curse him whom the Lord has not cursed?***

- **V 7-12. What did Balaam's first prophecy say about Israel and about God?**

The themes of Balaam's first prophecy include both the sovereignty of God and the holiness of God's people. Balaam declares that no one could curse a people which God had declared blessed. He spoke about Israel living *"in isolation"* and *"not among the other nations"* (v 9). This is because God had called them to be a holy nation. Holiness implies the idea of "separation." God desired them to be separated **from** sin and worldliness and separated **to** Him.

In verse 10, Balaam calls Israel **upright** (literally, "straight"; "righteous"; "well-pleasing"). Balaam says he would like to have the same heritage as Israel, because they would be too numerous to count and would have the favor of God.

V 19. What important truth about God did Balaam share in this second prophecy?

Even though Balaam's first prophecy did not produce the curse that Balak hoped for, he did not give up. He asked Balaam to try again from a different vantage point. When Balaam sought the Lord again, the answer was the same. Balaam uttered a great truth about God in verse 19: ***"God is not a man, that He would lie, Nor a son of man, that He would change His mind; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"***

God always keeps His word. It is His nature to tell the truth. He also has the unlimited power to accomplish whatever He chooses to do, and no one has enough strength to prevent Him. God will do what He wills.

- **V 20-24. Why did Balaam utter a blessing and not a curse on Israel?**

Balaam was bound by God to say only what God desired to be said. He could not curse Israel, because God would not allow Him to do so. In fact, when He sought God for a word, God's message was to bless Israel. In verse 21 Balaam explained that the Lord God was **with** Israel. God brought Israel out of Egypt and fought powerfully for them **like the horns of the wild ox** (v 22). Verse 23 explains that not even a magic curse or a divination could prosper against Israel, because God was too powerful and would accomplish His purposes in them. In fact, verse 24 prophesies of their success in battle being like a lion devouring its prey.

- **V 25-30. How did Balak respond to Balaam's first two messages?**

Balak was frustrated with Balaam and wanted him to stop speaking all together if all he could do was bless Israel. But Balak was determined to try once more to find a way for Balaam to curse Israel.

Numbers 24:1-25

Questions to Ponder:

- **V 1-2. What changed in Balaam's methodology and why?**
- **V 3-4. How did Balaam describe himself?**
- **V 5-9. What new things did Balaam prophesy about Israel this time?**
- **V 10-14. What did these prophecies cost Balaam?**
- **V 15-25. What did Balaam's final prophecy foretell?**

Numbers 24

1 When Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times to seek omens, rather he turned his attention toward the wilderness. 2 And Balaam

raised his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and **the Spirit of God came upon him**. 3 Then he took up his discourse and said,

"The declaration of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the declaration of the man **whose eye is opened**;
4 The declaration of him **who hears the words of God, Who sees the vision of the Almighty**,
Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered,
5 How pleasant are your tents, Jacob,
Your dwelling places, Israel!
6 Like valleys that stretch out,
Like gardens beside a river,
Like aloes planted by the Lord,
Like cedars beside the waters.
7 Water will flow from his buckets,
And his seed will be by many waters,
And **his king shall be higher than Agag**,
And **his kingdom shall be exalted**.
8 God brings him out of Egypt,
He is for him like the horns of the wild ox.
He will devour the nations who are his adversaries,
And will crush their bones,
And smash them with his arrows.
9 He crouches, he lies down like a lion,
And like a lioness, who dares to rouse him?
Blessed is everyone who blesses you,
And cursed is everyone who curses you."

10 Then Balak's anger burned against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, but behold, **you have persisted in blessing them these three times!** 11 So flee to your place now. I said I would honor you greatly, but behold, **the Lord has held you back from honor.**" 12 And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not in fact tell your messengers whom you had sent to me, saying, 13 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the Lord, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the Lord speaks, I will speak?' 14 So now, behold, I am going to my people; come, **and I will advise you of what this people will do to your people in the days to come.**"

15 Then he took up his discourse and said,
"The declaration of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the declaration of the man whose eye is opened,
16 The declaration of him who hears the words of God,
And knows the knowledge of the Most High,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered:
17 I see him, but not now;
I look at him, but not near;
A star shall appear from Jacob,
A scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall smash the forehead of Moab,
And overcome all the sons of Sheth.
18 And Edom shall be a possession,
Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession,

While Israel performs valiantly.
19 One from Jacob shall rule,
And will eliminate the survivors from the city."

20 And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said,

"Amalek was the first of the nations,
But his end shall be destruction."

21 And he looked at the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said,

"Your dwelling place is enduring,
And your nest is set in the cliff.

22 Nevertheless Kain will suffer devastation;
How long will Asshur keep you captive?"

23 Then he took up his discourse and said,

"Oh, who can live unless God has ordained it?"
24 But ships shall come from the coast of Kittim,
And they shall oppress Asshur and oppress Eber;
So they also will come to destruction."

25 Then Balaam arose, and he departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went on his way.

Notes:

- **V 1-2. What changed in Balaam's methodology and why?**

Apparently, Balaam's first two prophecies involved him seeking omens. This time he already knew that **it pleased the Lord to bless Israel** (v 1). As he looked upon Israel camped in the wilderness, **the Spirit of God came upon him**, and he uttered another blessing over Israel. The scriptures describe Balaam with the attributes of a true prophet—he "heard the word of the Lord" and "the Spirit of God came upon him." However, his life came to destruction, because he followed his own desires instead of being dedicated to the will and ways of Yahweh.

- **V 3-4. How did Balaam describe himself?**

Balaam thought of himself as **the man whose eye is opened, who hears the words of God, and who sees the vision of the Almighty**. This makes his later demise even more tragic. It serves to remind us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought, because *pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall* (Proverbs 16:18; see also 1 Corinthians 10:12).

- **V 5-9. What new things did Balaam prophesy about Israel this time?**

Balaam's third prophecy told of the future fruitfulness of Israel and the exaltation of its kingdom above the surrounding nations. In verse 9 Balaam hears a word from the Lord that was part of the original covenant God made with Abraham: **"Blessed is everyone who blesses you, And cursed is everyone who curses you"** (see Genesis 12:3; 27:29).

- **V 10-14. What did these prophecies cost Balaam?**

Balak told Balaam that because he did not curse Israel, that he would not receive payment for his services. Balak

said that *“the Lord has held you back from honor”* (v 11). Balaam reiterated that he had told the messengers from the first that even *“If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the Lord, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the Lord speaks, I will speak?”* (v 13). Balaam seemed to be saying all of the right things and representing the Lord unselfishly. But Numbers 25 and 31 tell a different story, as we will see in a moment.

- **V 15-25. What did Balaam’s final prophecy foretell?**

Balaam’s final prophecy spoke of the downfall of Balak’s kingdom of Moab and the surrounding kingdoms at the hands of Israel. In verse 17 he also prophesies about a great future king of Israel who will bring Israel ultimate victory:

I see him, but not now;

I look at him, but not near;

A star shall appear from Jacob,

A scepter shall rise from Israel...

In Matthew 2:1-2 we are told that after Jesus was born in Bethlehem that magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying: *“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”* Apparently they were familiar with this prophecy of Balaam, because it is the only recorded place where the star is mentioned in relation to Israel’s kingdom.

Balaam’s Legacy

Even though Balaam was unable to pronounce a curse against Israel, he later helped Balak to weaken them. In **Numbers 25** we hear about the daughters of Moab inducing the men of Israel to sexual immorality and idolatry. The end of the chapter explains that people of Moab had deceived or tricked them. **Numbers 31** says that Balaam had been the one who counseled Moab on how to render Israel ineffective and remove God’s hand of protection from them by seducing them to immorality. You should read the entire chapters, but consider these verses from Numbers 25 and 31:

Numbers 25:1-3

*1 While Israel remained at Shittim, **the people began to commit infidelity with the daughters of Moab.** 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel became followers of Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry with Israel.*

Numbers 31:14-16

Note: The army went and defeated Moab, but they spared the lives of the women which angered Moses.

*... 14 But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. 15 And Moses said to them, “Have you spared all the women? 16 Behold, they caused the sons of Israel, **through the***

counsel of Balaam, to be unfaithful to the Lord in the matter of Peor, so that the plague took place among the congregation of the Lord!

Peter Naylor in the *New Bible Commentary on Numbers* explains how Balaam is viewed in the Bible:

Balaam is regarded in Scripture as an evil man. The apostle Peter’s verdict is, ‘He loved the wages of wickedness’ (2 Pet. 2:15-16; Jude 11). His desire for riches drove him to oppose God and his people. The text repeatedly mentions his fees for divination (Numbers 22:7, 17-18; 24:11). When Israel took revenge on Midian, Balaam perished with them (Numbers 31:8).

Balaam becomes an example for us to not put greed before our call to walk with the Lord and our commission to represent Him in this world. He also helps us to recognize false teaching that would emphasize feelings and sensuality over faith and obedience. If we are not careful, we can become ones who *“worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever”* (Romans 1:25).

Other Passages about Balaam:

- **Joshua 24:9-10** God explained that He rescued His people from Balaam’s intent to curse them. *9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, rose up and fought against Israel, and he sent messengers and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. **10 But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I saved you from his hand.***
- **2 Peter 2:12-16** Balaam is used as an example of a false teacher who went astray and caused others to go astray, because he loved *“the reward of unrighteousness”* more than he desired to follow the Lord. Peter warns us not to follow in *“...the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the reward of unrighteousness; 16 but he received a rebuke for his own offense, for a mute donkey, speaking with a human voice, restrained the insanity of the prophet.”*
- **Jude 10-11** Balaam exemplifies those who would live by base instincts and allow greed to lead them into error (*“...for pay they have given themselves up to the error of Balaam...”* [v 11]).
- **Revelation 2:14** Jesus warned the church of Pergamum to beware of those who follow the teaching of Balaam which leads God’s people to stumble into idolatry and immorality.

Balaam knew the words of the Lord and had the Spirit come upon him to be used to bless Israel. But Balaam never loved the Lord and received only His wrath in the end. What about you? Do you know **about** the Lord, or do you **know** the Lord? Make sure you are right with Him today.

Lesson by Bro Stan