

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 14

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 23-24

INTRODUCTION

There are many lessons that we can learn from the Balaam episode (Numbers 22-24). The life of a Christian is a constant spiritual battle against the agents of spiritual wickedness in high places. Sometimes we are unaware of secret plots and ploys to discredit and destroy us when we do the will of God. It is a true saying, that not all who profess to know God and the Lord Jesus Christ possess the fruit of their profession. Balaam epitomises this kind of a Christian. And not to mention the revelation of wonderful truths about the living God.

Numbers 22-24 record Balak's attempts to get the Gentile prophet Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam spoke four times. Each time instead of cursing Israel, he pronounced blessings upon blessings on the children of Israel. The enemies of God's people will try all kinds of ways to destroy them. And it is interesting to know that Israel was unaware of these moves to destroy them. But the nation Israel had God, and when one has God with him, he has the victory every time and all the time. The Word of God is indeed

refreshing and rejuvenating food for our souls.

OUTLINE

A. Balaam's First Attempt to Curse Israel Failed (23:1-13).

1. Balaam ordered the preparation of altars and animal sacrifices (23:1-3).
2. God met Balaam (23:4-6).
3. Balaam made his first oracle (23:7-10).
 - a) Balak brought Balaam to curse Israel (7).
 - b) Balaam was unable to curse Israel (8a).
 - c) God blessed Israel (8b).
 - d) God chose Israel to be His alone (9).
 - e) God increased the people of Israel (10).
4. Balak was angry with Balaam (23:11-13).

B. Balaam's Second Attempt to Curse Israel Also Failed (23:14-26).

1. Balak tried again and brought Balaam to Mount Pisgah (23:14-15).
2. The LORD met Balaam and put His word in his mouth (23:16).
3. Balak asked Balaam what the LORD had spoken to him (23:17-18).
4. Balaam made his second oracle (23:19-24).
 - a) God does not change His Word (19-20).
 - b) God unconditionally and immovably loves His people (21).
 - c) God has demonstrated His

irresistible power to save and bless Israel (22-24).

5. Balaam told Balak that he had to speak the Word of the LORD (23:25-26).

C. Balaam's Third Attempt to Curse Israel Again Failed (23:27-24:9).

1. Balak tried a third time to use Balaam to curse Israel (23:27).
2. Balak took Balaam to Mount Peor (23:28).
3. Balaam ordered the building of seven altars and the animal sacrifices (23:29-30).
4. Balaam made his third oracle (24:1-9).
 - a) Balaam departed from his two previous practices and proceeded to speak (1-2a).
 - b) The Spirit of God came upon him (2b)
 - c) Balaam testified three things of himself (3-4).
 - His eyes were opened
 - He heard God's words
 - He saw a vision of God.
 - d) Israel was beautiful and bountifully provided for by the LORD (5-7a).
 - e) Israel would be strong and powerful and defeat all her enemies (7b-9a).
 - f) Blessing and cursing upon those who bless and curse Israel (9b).

D. Balak Decided to Send Balaam Off (24:11-14).

1. Balak was very angry with Balaam (23:11).

2. Balak told Balaam off (23:12).
3. Balaam defended his actions (23:13).
4. Balaam invited Balak to go with him and he would advise him (23:14).

E. Balaam Fourth Attempt to Curse Israel Failed (24:15-25).

1. Balaam credited himself (23:15-16).
 - a) His eyes were open (15).
 - b) He received God's words (16a).
 - c) He knew God (16b)
 - d) He saw a vision of God (16c).
2. Balaam made his fourth oracle (23:17-19).
 - a) A Star and a Sceptre out of Jacob would rise (23:17).
 - b) Israel would be victorious against her enemies (23:18).
 - c) A ruler would emerge from Israel (23:19).

F. Balaam Prophesied Concerning Other Nations (24:20-25).

1. Balaam prophesied against the Amalekites (24:20).
2. Balaam prophesied against the Kenites (24:21-22).
3. Balaam prophesied against Chittim, Asshur, and Eber (24:23-24)
4. Balaam returned to his country and Balak went his way (24:25).

COMMENTARY

God Blessed His People

Balaam required that Balak build seven altars and sacrifice seven bulls and seven rams on each of the altar. Bulls and rams were prized and expensive animals. The fact that Balaam asked for these animals showed his attempt to impress on Balak of his status and self-importance. Moreover, it could be Balaam's attempt to placate and appease the LORD (Yahweh). But can the God of Israel be bribed or bought? We will soon know. Balaam went aside to consult God. God met with him and put His word in Balaam's mouth. Balaam rejoined Balak, told him to stand by the burnt sacrifice, and he pronounced his "curse."

Instead of cursing Israel, Balaam blessed Israel. He declared that he could not curse Israel because God was blessing Israel. The nation Israel had been set apart from all the other nations. It was special to God. God had greatly blessed and multiplied her number. The fact of Israel's growing population is depicted in the phrase, "the dust of Jacob." This is a partial fulfilment of God's covenant promise to Abraham.¹ Balak, the enemy of Israel, rightly remarked, "*I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold. Thou hast blessed them altogether*" (23:11). Balaam reminded Balak that he must speak what the LORD had put in his mouth

to speak. Balak wanted to try again. This time he took Balaam to another vantage point where he could not see the whole encampment of Israel. Balak hoped that Balaam by seeing only a part of Israel, he might not be afraid and curse Israel. Balak was not learning his lesson well. He was thinking foolishly and deceiving himself. Balaam once more demanded the erection of seven altars and the same animal sacrifices. The LORD (Yahweh) met Balaam, put His word in his mouth, and commanded Balaam to go back to Balak and prophesy.

God is True to His People

Balaam rejoined Balak. The princes of Moab also joined in. Balak asked Balaam what the LORD said. Balaam made his second "curse." Once again, it was no curse but blessing all the way. Balaam declared at least three great truths about God. God is not like man who could lie. God does not lie. God is not a liar. God is ever true, today, yesterday and tomorrow, and all eternity. God is unchangeable in His character. God is unmoveable in His love for His people. God loves the people of Israel. He is with them. Nothing can change His covenant, which He made with them. God is powerful and this is seen in the way He delivered Israel from Egypt. The power of God is irresistible and no man's chant or curse could affect Israel. Balaam went to predict that Israel would rise up to become a great and strong nation. She will destroy all her enemies (23:2). Balak was at his wits' end. "Don't curse them and don't bless them," Balak told Balaam (23:25). Balaam stubbornly reminded Balak again,

¹ Genesis 3:16 Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

“Didn’t I tell you that all that the LORD speaks, that I must do” (23:26).

God Provides and Protects His People

Balak was indeed desperate. He made a third try, hoping that the third time it might be successful. He brought Balaam to Mount Peor that overlooked Jerusalem. Mount Peor was the place where the Canaanite god Baal was believed to live and worshipped. Balak thought that by bringing Balaam there, the gods would be pleased and Balaam would be compelled to curse Israel. Balak revealed his ignorance about the LORD God of Israel. The LORD (Yahweh) is not like one of the many gods which the other nations worshipped. Yahweh is the one living and true God, and none else! Balak refused to acknowledge the God of Israel.

Balaam, realising that by blessing Israel, the LORD was pleased. This time he did not go aside to perform his ritual of chanting, but proceeded straightaway to deliver his oracle. The Spirit of God came upon him. This is an example of the inspiration of God’s Word, which was given to Balaam. Interestingly, we notice that Balaam was quite boastful of his ability. He called on his hearers to hearken unto him for “his eyes are open”—he had special knowledge. He had said that he heard the Word of God. He also had seen a vision of the Almighty God (24:3-4).

Balaam delivered his third prophecy. It was a twofold blessing. The oracle was in beautiful poetic prose. He declared that Israel was a contented people and they lacked

nothing. The LORD gave them goodly tents and tabernacles, the lushes valleys, gardens, rivers, and trees. These are symbols of Israel’s prosperity. Balaam went on to prophesy that the LORD would exalt Israel. Israel’s king would prevail over Agag (the king of the Amalekites).² Israel would be like a great lion. He repeated the words of the LORD to Abraham, “Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee” (24:9).³

Balak had enough of Balaam. He was very angry; He chided Balaam and told him to make a beeline to his hometown. Balak even used the name of the LORD to say that it was the LORD who had prevented him from receiving his reward. He expected Balaam to be fuming angry. Instead Balaam retorted back and reminded him what he had earlier said to him, that even if he would pay him handsomely, he could not go beyond the commandment of God.

God Shall Raise a Star Out of Israel

Balaam responded quite unusually for one who had been motivated by greed of silver and gold. Instead of heading to his hometown, he invited Balak to go with him and that he would counsel what Israel would do to him and his subjects (24:14). Balaam’s fourth oracle was brief. He predicted that “a

² Samuel 15:8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

³ Genesis 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab and destroy all the children of Sheth” (24:17).⁴ He then proceeded to speak concerning Edom. Israel too would be victorious over Edom.

There is much discussion about the “star” and the “sceptre”. In Biblical literature the “star” is used as a metaphor to refer to a “ruler”. The king of Babylon was called the morning star (Isaiah 14:12).⁵ In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ is described as “the Bright and Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16).⁶ The “sceptre” clearly speaks of royalty.

This prophecy refers to King David who conquered Moab and Edom.⁷ But this verse also points to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah whom the Jews, even today, are expecting to save them and subdue all the other nations and rule the new

world. Christ is the Greater Son of King David. He will return one day, visibly and bodily, as the King of kings to establish the Kingdom of God and rule the new world.

Balaam looked on and saw the Amalekites, and still under the inspiration of God, he predicted concerning the Amalekites. Balaam’s prophecy foretold the destruction of the Amalekites who regarded themselves as the “first of the nations”. The Kenites were also not spared and they would be taken captive by Assyria. The invaders who came by ships from the coast of Chittim (today, the island of Cyprus) would destroy the Asshuric tribes and demolish Eber, the nomadic descendants of the patriarch Eber (Genesis 10:21, 24-25).⁸

After Balaam ended this fourth oracle, he headed home to his country. Balak went his separate way.

SUMMARY

As already mentioned above, there are several deep lessons that we can learn from Numbers 22-24. First the concept of the sovereignty of God is clearly illustrated in these chapters. No one, not even the king, can thwart God’s plan and purpose. Balak tried to curse and weaken Israel so that he could attack and destroy her. He even sought the assistance of spiritual powers to ensure the defeat of Israel. Israel was unaware of what her enemies

⁴ Jeremiah 48:45 They that fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon because of the force: but a fire shall come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and shall devour the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones.

⁵ Isaiah 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

⁶ Revelation 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star.

⁷ 2 Samuel 8:2 And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David’s servants, and brought gifts.

⁸ Jacob Milgrom, The JPS Torah Commentary, Numbers, pp. 208-210; and R. K. Harrison, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary-Numbers, pp.325-327.

were doing against her. Yet no harm came to her, because God forbid Balaam to curse Israel. Secondly, Balaam's prophecies, under the inspiration of God, reveal wonderful truths about the LORD our God. He is true to His Word and promises; He loves His people even though they sometimes rebel against Him. This tells us that He is longsuffering and merciful. He loves, He protects and He provides for the needs of His people. In these chapters, the Spirit of God shows us that God is sovereign, almighty in both the physical and spiritual realms; loving, forgiving and protecting His people; blessing them with good things; but punishes the wicked; keeping His covenant promises.

A solemn and sobering lesson is learned from Balaam. We see him as a person who had the privilege of meeting with God. God also communed with him and he took orders from God. He obeyed those orders, and even confessed his sins. He was used of God. Yet Balaam was not a saint. Years later, he taught the Moabites how they could destroy Israel by making the LORD God of Israel angry with them. He taught them to entice the Israelite men to marry their women and worship the Canaanite gods (Numbers 31:16).⁹

Balaam illustrates the kind of "Christians" who profess to know God and the Lord Jesus Christ. They even preach and teach in Christ's

name, and perform great works and even cast out demons. And the Lord Jesus Christ will one day say to these professing Christians, "I never knew you, depart from me ye that worketh iniquity." These kinds of "Christians" are like clouds without water. They are not genuine. They are actually hypocrites. They have academic knowledge of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. They claim that they know God and love the Lord Jesus Christ but have no fear of God. They do not obey His commandments. Some even twist and distort the Word of God to promote their own schemes and self-importance. In view of this, we need to honestly examine ourselves and be sure of our profession of faith in Christ Jesus. Do we know for certain that we are born-again children of God?

One of the greatest comforts in life is to know that no harm can happen to God's people unless God permits. When He permits, it must be for good. It could serve to strengthen our faith and reliance on Him or to chastise us for our daily sins. And the most wonderful fact is that our enemies may plan and plot against us secretly. Although we are unaware of it, God to whom nothing can be hidden will protect His own. We recall Romans 8:28-29, *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* Many of us are familiar with this assurance from God, and we do not hesitate to publicly declare and claim the promise from God, and we do not hesitate to publicly declare and claim the promise. But we forget the second part of the Word which is

⁹ Numbers 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

equally if not more important, and that is, “to them that LOVE God, to them who are the CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.” The promise applies to Christians who love God and who are doing His will. If we love God, we obey Him. How many “Christians” habitually sin or do not care about living a holy life? How many “Christians” are really doing the will of God? Romans 8:28 applies only to these Christians. So let us give our *bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. AMEN.*

DAILY READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MONDAY: Numbers 23:1-12; Ephesians 6:11-18; Matthew 7:22-23¹⁰

1. What was the significance or purpose of Balaam instructing Balak to offer seven oxen and seven rams on seven altars?

¹⁰ Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: 18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

Matthew 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

2. The LORD inspired Balaam to speak His Word. Does it make Balaam a Christian? What truth does this teach us?

TUESDAY: Numbers 23:13-26; Daniel 4:35; Proverbs 30:5.¹¹

3. In Balaam's second word of prophecy, wherein lies Israel's strength and power?

4. Say in your own words three great truths about the character and personality of God as revealed in 23:19-24?

¹¹ Daniel 4:35 And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

WEDNESDAY: Numbers 23:27-24:9; Psalm 89:20-29; 1Samuel 15:32-33.¹²

5. What did Balaam say of himself before he gave the third oracle? How come?

¹² Psalm 89:20 I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: 21 With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. 22 The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. 23 And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. 24 But my faithfulness and my mercy *shall be* with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. 25 I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. 26 He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. 27 Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. 28 My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. 29 His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

1 Samuel 15:32 Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. 33 And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

6. What is the main theme of Balaam's third prophecy concerning Israel?

8. What is the emphasis in Balaam's fourth prophecy?

THURSDAY: Numbers 24:10-19; Revelation 22:16; Zechariah 9:9-10.¹³

7. Did Balak tell Balaam to curse Israel this time? Why?

¹³ Revelation 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star.

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. 10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion *shall be* from sea *even* to sea, and from the river *even* to the ends of the earth.

**FRIDAY: Numbers 24:20-25;
Romans 8:28-39.¹⁴**

9. Balaam professed many things about himself with God (chs. 22-24). What are they? Can you suggest anyone in the New Testament who was very close to Jesus Christ, yet was a fraud all his life?

10. How has this whole incident concerning Balaam helped you in your spiritual life?

¹⁴ Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. 31 What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. 34 Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.