

Ministry of Grace Church

Numbers Chapter 24 – Speaker Notes

Numbers 24:1-2

When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him,

Our translation says that Balaam did not go, “as at other times.” This may be an indication that it was Balaam’s normal practice to use incantations. It is conceivable that these former incantations were Balaam’s formula for bringing a curse on someone. After all, that’s what he had been hired to do. Since they had been of no avail in the first two attempts against Israel, perhaps he realized that such action would be equally futile in this case. Therefore, he turned to face the encampment of Israel in the wilderness of Moab. Instead of retiring to a solitary place and practicing his sorcery, Balaam simply turned and directed his gaze at the Israelite encampment.

In the previous two oracles it is said “the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth” (Numbers 23:5) and “the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth” (Numbers 23:16). This time, however, instead of simply telling Balaam what to say, “the Spirit of God came upon him.” This is an expression indicating that the Holy Spirit put him into an altered state of mind and body whereby the Spirit controlled him. This expression is used in reference to King Saul and other prophets of *Yahweh* (1 Samuel 10:10; 1 Samuel 19:23; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 2 Chronicles 15:1).

In the Old Testament, nobody was said to be indwelt with the Spirit of God, only that the Spirit came upon them. In the New Testament however, when a person becomes a Christian, he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are given the Spirit as a seal of God’s promise, a guarantee that God will fulfill the promise of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit now dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Numbers 24:3-4

and he took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered:

As with the previous two oracles of Balaam, this is presented in a poetic meter. Notice how the opening of this oracle is all about Balaam. When true prophets of *Yahweh* speak, they usually begin with “Thus says the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:27)

The word translated “opened” is *shawtham*. Although *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* lists this as meaning “to unveil or to be open,” there is significant evidence that it can sometimes mean “closed.” If this is the case here, then Balaam is proclaiming that though he is unable to see with his natural sight, *Yahweh* has given him spiritual sight (insight). This is further supported by the reference to his falling down with his eyes wide open, which is apparently a reference to his eyes having been opened by the Angel of the Lord when he fell down before Him in chapter 22. Previously, we saw that Balaam was blind to the spiritual things of this world. When his donkey was able to see the Angel of God, Balaam could not. It was not until *Yahweh* opened his eyes that he was able to see the hidden things of this world. Now, he claims to be one whose eyes are opened, and he claims to be able to hear the very words of God. Notice, however, that he presents these facts with a focus on himself. It appears that Balaam is declaring

that although he is blind to the reality of the spiritual world, God has opened his senses to see not only the present reality but the future of Israel as well.

Numbers 24:5-9

How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you.”

Balaam now describes the present condition of Israel. He describes the encampment before him as lovely. He sees them spread out in a very orderly fashion and proclaims them to be like valleys that stretch out (occupying a large amount of space) and like gardens by a river (very lush and well-watered).

The word translated “buckets” is expressed here in the dual. The dual form of a noun indicates a pair, like eyes, ears, arms, or legs. The significance here is that there is pictured an abundance of water like a man carrying two buckets rather than just one. The reference to “seed” is a reference to the descendants of Israel. Water is often used in prophecy to signify peoples, multitudes, or nations. This may be a reference to the fact that Israel will flourish even after having been disbursed throughout the nations of the world.

The Amalekites were the most powerful people at the time of the Exodus and Agag is the title that was used for their kings. So, to proclaim that Israel’s king will be higher than Agag is an indication of how strong and dominant the king of Israel will be. This is an example of prophesy which projects more than one event or person in the future. It is a reference to the great kings of Israel like David and Solomon but ultimately it is a reference to the Messiah whose kingdom will be exalted over all the earth.

God is here translated from the singular *el*. It is not a direct reference to *Yahweh* but a generic reference to the deity of Israel. Balaam recounts again the fact that the God of Israel has brought them out of Egypt. He declares Israel as having the strength of an ox. The word translated “wild ox” is *rēm* which refers to a large powerful animal with horns which are used both as offensive and defensive weapons. This word is translated as “unicorn” in some versions of the Bible. What Balaam is describing here is the fact that Israel is a formidable nation and that they will destroy all their enemies by overpowering them in war.

A lion is a symbol of fearlessness. A lion lies down wherever it pleases without fear. Israel, as the favored nation of *Yahweh* is represented as having security and living without fear.

And once again, as with the first oracle of Balaam, there is a reference to the promises of God to Abraham. When *Yahweh* first called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldeans He told him:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3)

Balaam was describing a nation that is powerful in war who will destroy all those who oppose them. This also served as a warning to Balak that God would be against anyone who curses Israel.

Numbers 24:10, 11

And Balak’s anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, “I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times.

Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, ‘I will certainly honor you,’ but the LORD has held you back from honor.”

The act of clapping ones hands together was a sign of greatest contempt, anger, and condemnation. Balak was obviously angry with Balaam because he did not curse Israel as Balak had requested. He retracts his initial offer of great riches and honor because Balaam had not done what was asked of him. Balak then accused *Yahweh* of having kept Balaam from receiving honor. Do you see the irony in this? In reality *Yahweh* had kept Balaam from being dishonored and destroyed by not allowing him to curse Israel. Notice also, the subtlety of Balak’s arrogance. He believes his own wishes and desires to be greater than that of Almighty God. And he believes that the rewards that he is capable of bestowing are of greater value than what *Yahweh* can bestow.

Although Balaam will claim that it is not his fault in the following verses, he nonetheless is guilty at least of deception. After all, he came to Balak at his request for a curse. Each time before declaring the oracle Balaam had Balak prepare seven altars, offering sacrifices on each one. This would necessarily have caused Balak to believe there was at least a chance of his receiving the curses he desired even though Balaam knew he was constrained to say what *Yahweh* wanted and that *Yahweh* considered Israel blessed.

Numbers 24:12-14

And Balaam said to Balak, “Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, ‘If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will. What the LORD speaks, that will I speak’? And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days.”

We see here now the results of putting one’s own desires and intentions above those of the LORD. Back at the beginning of chapter 22 we learned that *Yahweh* would not allow Balaam to curse Israel because they are blessed of God. Because Balaam continued to entertain the idea of doing what *Yahweh* clearly had told him not to do, he placed himself in a no-win situation. Throughout these three chapters we see Balaam apparently attempting to change *Yahweh*’s mind regarding something that had already been made clear. Balaam now uses his initial excuse as the reason why he had not cursed Israel as if he had been obedient to *Yahweh* all along.

Now Balaam offers a prophecy of the future of Israel, Moab, and the surrounding nations. This may have been done in an attempt to placate Balak’s anger or it may have been done at the prompting of *Yahweh*.

Numbers 24:15-16

And he took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle 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 with his eyes uncovered:

Oracle #1

Once again, we see Balaam going through his verbal chest pounding declaring himself to be God’s messenger. Balaam then utters his final oracle concerning Israel. Actually, it is a series of four oracles. The first is in **Numbers 24:15-19** regarding the destruction of Moab, the second is in **Numbers 24:20** regarding the destruction of Amalek, the third is in **Numbers 24:21, 22** regarding the destruction of the Kenites, and the fourth is in **Numbers 24:23, 24** regarding the destruction of Assyria.

Numbers 24:17-19

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly. And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!”

Balaam was informing Balak that the time about which he was prophesying was in the distant future. Therefore, Balam had nothing to fear regarding the things which were about to be said.

“A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel” – This could be rendered “when a star shall come unto Jacob, then a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” This appears to be a reference to the star which guided the magi to Bethlehem where the Messiah was born, who one day will become the ruler.

Balaam also predicts the future of the other peoples of this region; Edom, Amalek, the Kenites, Asshur (the Assyrians), and Eber (that is, the non-Jewish descendants of Eber). His reference to the one who will exercise dominion is most likely a dual reference to David (who would be the near-term conquering king) and the Messiah (who would ultimately destroy even the remains of the city).

Numbers 24:20

Then he looked on Amalek and took up his discourse and said, “Amalek was the first among the nations, but its end is utter destruction.”

Oracle #2

The second oracle of Balaam in this series of four is regarding Amalek. You will recall that when the Israelites arrived at Rephidim Moses struck a rock and a river of water flowed out of the rock providing the Israelites and their animals all the water they needed. Immediately afterward the Amalekites attacked the Israelites and Joshua led the army of Israel against Amalek. This was the first time in history that Israel fought against an enemy (God fought for them against Egypt). The reference here to Amalek being “first among the nations” is either a reference to the fact that Amalek was the most powerful army in the region (now that the Egyptian army had been defeated) or it is a reference to the fact that they were the first to attack Israel.

Numbers 24:21, 22

And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said, “Enduring is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock. Nevertheless, Kain shall be burned when Asshur takes you away captive.”

Oracle #3

The third oracle of Balaam in this four-part series is regarding the Kenites. They are described in Balaam’s prophecy as having a firm dwelling place, set in the rock. This may be a reference to the way in which their cities were built into the rocks, although there is no archeological evidence of this. It is more likely a reference to the fact that they had befriended Israel and were, therefore built on “the rock” which is *Yahweh*. Nevertheless, in spite of their friendship with Israel in the early years, they would be carried away captive when Asshur (Asyria) defeated the ten northern tribes of Israel. Nothing is said about the Kenites in the Bible after that.

Numbers 24:23-24

And he took up his discourse and said, “Alas, who shall live when God does this? But ships shall come from Kittim and shall afflict Asshur and Eber; and he too shall come to utter destruction.”

Oracle #4

Finally, the fourth oracle of Balaam is regarding the conquest of the Assyrians by a great Western power that will conquer Cyprus on its path to conquering the Promised Land. There have been two such powers to date: the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, and Rome. There is yet a third power who will do the same. It is the army of the Antichrist, which will conquer Israel in the middle of the Tribulation.

This last phrase should probably have been translated as “[And it also for ever is perishing.](#)” This is possibly a reference to the kingdom of the Antichrist which will conquer the Israelites during the Tribulation but will itself perish forever when the Messiah (Christ) returns to set-up the Millennial Kingdom.

Numbers 24:25

Then Balaam rose and went back to his place. And Balak also went his way.

We are then told that Balaam, “[went back to his place.](#)” This should probably read, “[turned toward his place.](#)” We know for a fact that he did not return to his home in Northwest Mesopotamia because we find that he joined forces with the Midianites in seducing the Israelites into idolatry. ([Numbers 31:16](#))

We also find that Balaam is still with the Midianites when they are defeated by the Israelites in ([Numbers 31:8](#)).

So What?

The Great Pretender

As we look at the story of Balaam, we see that he presents himself as a prophet of *Yahweh*. He may have actually believed himself to be so. Because of his actions, however, it becomes clear that he was only pretending. And though we eventually see that his faith in *Yahweh* is a sham, nonetheless, let’s observe his pretense and compare it to our own relationship with Almighty God.

I’m sure that each one of us right now can think of a person who claims to be a Christian, and yet the way they live their life demonstrates that their faith is only a pretense. He or she may call himself or herself a Christian, but it is obvious that there is neither a submission to God nor a personal relationship with Him. Balaam, acting as if he were a true prophet of God, claimed to seek out an answer from *Yahweh* when he was first approached by the emissaries of Balak. He even encountered *Yahweh* in a dream giving him answers to his questions. Likewise, those who claim to be Christian will often talk about how God has answered their prayers. But we also see that Balaam was blind to spiritual things and had to be taught by a stupid donkey before he could see the truth that was standing right in front of him. Likewise, the great pretender Christians of today are ignorant of who God really is and blind to the way He works. Instead, they believe that rituals and traditions will fill the void created by a lack of a relationship with God.

Balaam went through all the motions of religious practice as he instructed Balak to build altars and offer sacrifices. But, he was blind to the fact that he had mixed-in ungodly practices with these actions as if sorcery was perfectly acceptable to *Yahweh* (which we know it isn’t). This is no different than the religious paganism we see in some church practices today. We see, however, that Balaam’s “religious practices” were all for show and did nothing to endear him to *Yahweh*. He thought that by doing religious deeds he could influence Almighty God to change His mind. Yet, we know that God does not change.

Balaam even testified that God always does what He says that He will do, yet it appears that he was all the while trying to change God’s determined will. In spite of the fact that Balaam proclaimed that God doesn’t change His mind, he tried to change God’s mind. That is, Balaam sought to turn God’s blessing

into a curse. Yet we know that God does exactly as He wants to do, as Paul teaches us in the book of Romans:

So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (Romans 9:18)

Thus, we see how utterly foolish Balaam's thinking was as he pretended to be something he wasn't. What is not altogether clear is whether he was doing these things to convince others or himself. Apparently, he thought he was a true prophet of *Yahweh*, yet it is obvious that he was not.

Lessons to be learned

The first thing we need to learn from this is that God is in control of all His creation. He is supreme and does whatever He determines.

The second thing to learn is that our religious actions do not influence God's will. No matter what we think or what we do, we do not influence God's decision making process.

And finally, instead of expending effort trying to influence God's will, we should be putting our effort into submitting to His will. He is the potter, we are just the clay. He is the Lord and Master, we are but His servants.

But we have to ask ourselves, "Why did Balaam act this way?" It wasn't because *Yahweh* had not revealed Himself to Balaam. Balaam's problem was that he wanted God on his own terms instead of accepting God on God's terms. Balaam wanted to control both his beliefs and his relationship with God. In other words, he refused to submit to God's authority.

It is so easy to be observant and critical of things in front of us ... Unless the thing in front of us is a mirror! Let's take a few moments to examine our own faith and our own relationship with God. How much of your religious practice is actually performed to influence God? Let me ask you some questions to help you evaluate why you do what you do. You don't have to answer out loud, but you do have to be honest with yourself and with our God.

Do you read your Bible regularly? If you do, that's great, but why do you do it? Do you read your Bible because you're supposed to, or because you've been taught how important it is to read your Bible? Or do you read your Bible regularly because you want to know God better and you want to learn how to know and do His will. If you don't read your Bible regularly, why don't you? Are you just lazy? Are you too busy? Or are you just too tired when you finally get time to do it? In order to develop a personal relationship with God, we need to know as much about Him as we can and we need to listen to His message for us. We can't do these things unless we commit to reading the Bible for the purpose of learning about God and His dealings with us. Let's all commit to spending more time reading our Bibles, not because we're supposed to and not to impress God, but because we want to develop a closer relationship with Him.

Do you pray regularly? When you do pray, are you always asking God to fix something? Sure, we're supposed to make our requests known to God, but prayer is not all about having a heavenly sugar daddy or a heavenly genie. Prayer is simply conversation with God. When we pray, we need to start out with our commitment to submit to His will. Prayer should be bathed with a conscious recognition of His greatness and our lowliness. Then prayer should be seeking His will with regard to whatever He has laid on our hearts. Prayer is not for show, it is not just for us, and it's not about trying to influence God. Prayer is to glorify God by fellowshiping with Him.

Obviously, you're in church today. But why are you here? Is it for yourself? Is it to impress or please those around you? Or is it for Him? Are you here to feel good about yourself? Or are you here to learn more about who He is and how you can serve Him better?

Now, let me talk for a minute about giving. Why do you give your offerings to the church? Is it because you have been brow beaten by your Pastor? I certainly hope you don't feel that way here! Do you give because you feel guilty when you don't? If you don't give, is it because you think you can't afford to? Or do you give because it's your way of saying thanks to God for the blessings He has given you? We should all be giving of ourselves and our income because we know that it blesses God to see us sacrifice for Him. It's part of the evidence that we come to church to be a blessing, not to be blessed. For we know that when we are a blessing to others, we are blessed ourselves. And we know that God loves a cheerful giver.

Perhaps, you read your Bible, pray to God, attend church, and give your money because you want to influence the way God treats you. If so, then quit doing it. It's a waste of time and effort! Let me repeat that. If you're going through the motions of being a good Christian in order to influence the way God treats you, then knock it off. It's a waste of time and effort. We have a great God who loves each one of us with a perfect love, because He has chosen to do so. Let's quit making our Christianity about ourselves and make it about God. Let's submit ourselves to Him and commit to doing deeds for His glory, giving Him all the praise.

One day we'll all stand before God and two great facts will be revealed. The first is whether or not you have ever truly accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and **Lord**. If not, then your "faith" is just a charade and you will suffer eternally for it in the Lake of Fire, separated from His presence, experiencing regret and anguish. The second fact that will be revealed when you stand before your God is whether you have lived your life for yourself or for Him. If you have lived for yourself, all your deeds will go up in smoke. If you have lived your life for Him, submitted to Him, and seeking to do His will, then you will receive rewards. What kind of treasure are you storing up right now? Earthly wealth, or heavenly blessing?

Let's pray!