

"A Long Look Forward"

Numbers 24

Balak, the King of Moab, is not happy here in Num. 24. He heard about this powerful prophet who specialized in talking to the gods of the world [reminder: there are no other gods but Yahweh and he was only talking to demonic spirits] who lived far away up north. Balak sends an entourage of important people to lure Balaam to come, who then inform Balak that he talked to Israel's God [which God allowed and used!] and He said Balaam is not to go for the purpose of cursing Israel.

When the second entourage returns with higher-ranking officials than the first group, Balaam says 'I'll ask again but He did say no the first time.' Balaam shows us he really wants to go because the money will be good, God allows him to go but then confronts him through the angel of the Lord's appearance to Balaam's donkey.

God makes a donkey of Balaam, who prides himself on seeing the unseen and talking to the spirit world. But it's his donkey who sees into the spirit world when he sees the angel of the Lord and actually saves Balaam from being destroyed by the angel. God opens the donkey's mouth to challenge his owner as to why he was punishing him, and Balaam talks back to the donkey without thinking how weird this was. At this point God opens Balaam's eyes, rebukes him for his selfishness, but says, I'm going to send you Balak but you won't be able to say anything bad about Israel.

Balak is about excited to see Balaam probably like Haman was about building a 90' gallows for Mordecai in the book of Esther. But God spoils both their fun and turns things back on Balak and Moab. Balak will spare no expense (14 bulls and altars) to have Balaam curse Israel for him but Balaam can't. In the first oracle he said:

*22:8 How can I curse those whom God has not cursed?
How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced?*

In the second oracle he said,

23:18 ... "Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. ¹⁹ God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? ²⁰ I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.

Now we come to the 3rd and 4th oracles. Balak gets 7 more bulls and rams on 7 altars to appease Israel's God with the desire to manipulate him to do Balak's bidding. This time God does something different. Balaam doesn't do his demonic mumbo-jumbo. Instead, God puts the Holy Spirit on Balaam temporarily, and Balaam speaks the way Israel's prophets spoke. In both of these last two oracles, the Spirit leads Balaam to begin with words that clearly show this is from God:

24:3 "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, ⁴ the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened: [and in vv.15 and 16]

What does the Holy Spirit say about God's plan for Israel?

The Spirit Confirms Israel's Future Blessings **(24:1-9)**

When the Spirit opens Balaam's eyes and mouth, what does he want Balak (and all other nations who are thinking of causing harm to Israel) to know. Balaam looks out and sees the tents of Israel and calls them beautiful. Why? If you remember those exciting early chapters in Numbers about how Israel was to organize themselves when they camped, he saw a massive sea of people all orderly camped in rows and groups. An impressive sight, no doubt.

Then he uses four agricultural similes in v.6 to describe their fertility and growth. Then he pronounces their ultimate power

"Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted.

Agag was a title for a king, not a name. Like Pharaoh, or Caesar or Xerxes. At this point Israel has no king so this is all future prophecy. And in v.8 the Spirit describes Israel's future military successes, finishing with,

"May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!"

So the Spirit is predicting this. This is not Balaam's words himself but the Spirit's words. This attempt to curse was a way to manipulate the God of Israel to do Balak's bidding. But God overrules him in the spiritual realm. Which tells us that Israel's future blessings are completely linked to

The victory in the spiritual realm (vv.1-4)

God overrules Balak's desires and Balaam's attempts to change what God has said. Balaam is seeking to manipulate God in the spiritual realm but he fails. Victory has to be secured in the spiritual realm (vv.1-4)

To assure the earthly victory to follow (vv.5-9)

Vv. 5-9 talk about what Israel will do on the earth but this happens only because God secures victory in the spiritual realm. Remember, Balak believed he could change things on earth based on what he could do in the spiritual realm. The Bible tells us what God says in the spiritual realm about what's going to happen in the earthly realm. How do we know we'll have eternal life? How do we know Jesus will return and rule? Because He already secured the victory in the spiritual realm.

Heb. 2:14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Jesus became a human, was spiritually victorious in that He never sinned. Then He died for our sins yet rose victoriously from the dead to defeat Satan's power over death, now assuring our own future resurrection. This is why we know we have eternal life and will live eternally in God's presence because access to God is now available through Jesus' victory over death.

Jesus will also be victorious on the earth one day when He returns and defeats all Israel's enemies who will gather to annihilate them as prophesied in Daniel 11 and Zech. 14:2-9

Zech. 14:2 I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. ³ Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. ⁵ You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. ⁶ On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. ⁷ It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light. ⁸ On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. ⁹ The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

God's promises to Israel will come true because the Spirit says so and Jesus' death, resurrection and return guarantee it. Victory in the spiritual realm confirms victory in the earthly realm.

Balak is not happy about this but we'll talk about how to respond to these truths at the end. He essentially fires Balaam in v.11 but Balaam isn't done because God isn't done. God has a message for the enemies of His people. In vv.15-16 Balaam echoes the same preamble he spoke in v.4 letting us know this is still from the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God affirms God's covenantal promise to Abraham that whoever blesses His people will be blessed and whoever curses His people Israel will be cursed, then as we saw in vv.1-9 not only is Israel's future blessings assured so also does

The Spirit Foresees Israel's Enemies' Demise **(24:14-24)**

Balaam ominously tells Balak – who has tried very hard to curse Israel! – what's going to happen to his people (Moab) in the future. He begins in v.17 with a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. Many Jewish rabbis and scholars believed this was a reference to the Messiah, before Jesus arrived. Sadly, most did not connect this to Jesus. But the early church fathers like Justin Martyr and Athanasius also affirmed this referred to Jesus.

Balaam (by the Spirit) is talking about an individual (the Messiah) who has not arrived yet but is associated with a star from Jacob and will hold a scepter. The 'star' reference was understood by even the pagan world as a king. This is what the magi were associating with Jesus in Matt. 2:1-2

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

Kings have sceptres. And the Magi were looking for a Jewish King born as indicated by the appearance of "his star". Balaam clearly points out by the Spirit that those who curse Israel will one day be destroyed

Through the coming(s) of the star/scepter (vv.14-19)

Jesus first coming is associated with the star, which also identifies Him as a king but He has yet to wield the scepter and will do so when He returns as we read in Zech. 14. Again Zech. 14:9 says,

.⁹ The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

The prophets were unaware of the timeline of Jesus' arrival and so it's not unusual to see references to Jesus' first and second coming side by side. Two other examples are:

Is. 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

Zech. 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

His first coming was far away from Balaam's prediction and His return is yet to happen. But the consequences will be disastrous to Moab, Edom, Amalekites, the Kenites and others. David, whose line Jesus comes from, had many successful victories over some of these groups, particularly the Amalekites as recorded in 2 Sam. 8. Moab wasn't wiped out then because the prophet Amos prophesies (200-300 years later) their undoing in Amos 2:2

² I will send fire upon Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. ³ I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him," says the Lord.

When the Assyrians rose to power in the 8th century BC, Moab was captured and turned into a vassal state. And then under the Babylonian empire in the 7th century BC, Moab was destroyed and ceased to exist as a specific nation. The few who survived were assimilated into Jordan and Arabic cultures. And that's just one example of prophecies historically coming true on Israel's enemies. All these nations demise did or will happen which reminds us that

Fulfilled prophecy assures future prophecy's fulfilment (vv.20-24)

With all this historical evidence behind us and the very existence and strength of Israel as nation today in spite of all those who have tried over history to annihilate her, Israel still survives. And will survive and thrive under the Messiah's rule one day. Why? Because God's Word says so. The question for all of us then is

Will We Accept or Reject the Spirit's Words? **(24:10-13, 24)**

Balak didn't like what he heard. He was very angry about what the Spirit said about Israel. And we just heard about Moab's demise. But I want to finish with Psalm 2 and see the two basic responses to the Spirit's Words in Scripture concerning Israel's future exaltation when the Messiah returns.

¹ Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. ³ "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ⁶ "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷ I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." ¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The psalmist shows us there are only two choices we have when it comes to God's Words. The best choice is to,

Accept these words and be comforted (Ps. 2:1-9, 12b)

V.v1-2 is as much true today as it was when these words were written: the world opposes God and His anointed, the Messiah Jesus. Why have people always opposed God and His anointed ruler and His people? Because Satan wants to overthrow them. If he can annihilate Israel and their kings then the promises of God won't come true. But God says they plot in vain. That God will rebuke them in His anger and wrath. God speaks of installing His anointed, His Son on Jerusalem, referring to whoever was the Davidic king at the time but pointing forward to the fact that Jesus will return and reign. In v.8 it says one day the nations will serve Israel, God's righteous remnant under Jesus' rule. He will rule them (v.9) is a promise. And the psalm ends with those of us who 'kiss the son', (i.e. bend the knee to Him now, believing by faith that He has taken our sins upon Himself and will return to rule will experience His refuge, His comfort. Notice we are blessed. But many won't. Many will

Reject these words and suffer (Ps. 2:10-12a)

Balaam, through the Spirit, warned a king – Balak – and unless he repented, he does not get to enjoy eternity in God's presence. Nor will any world leader who refuses to accept God's words. And not just world leaders, nations and people too. Why do nations conspire and plot against God? It's vanity. It will not end well for you.

We who have placed our faith in God's Anointed, Jesus, believing that He is coming back, will be in God's presence for eternity – that is our comfort. The flip side of that sadly is many will not.

Last week we talked about all those people we interact with in our weekly routines. I challenged you in my Wednesday email to write down the people God brought to you. I was surprised at how many people God brought my way. Not that it led to any evangelistic opportunities this week but when I engaged with these people I was more alert to their need for Christ. And we all need to be more aware of people's need for Jesus.

The Balak and Balaam show is not over yet. They will reappear in Ch. 25. Why? Because the enemy is relentless in his attempts to thwart God's plans and distract the people of God from sharing God's Words with the world. The enemy does not win, Jesus does. And if Jesus does, so do we. Are we living as if we win? Are we praying for God to open doors for the gospel, that He would give us His words to share? Paul prayed while in prison,

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Let's do that for each other this week; to pray that we fearlessly make known the gospel. In 2 Tim. 2:9 Paul will get arrested again for sharing the gospel. But he reminded Timothy and us, ^{2 Tim. 2:8} Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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