

Balaam: Oracle #1

Good morning

**SLIDE: TITLE PAGE**

Today, we're continuing in the story of Balaam in the Book of Numbers. The story of Balaam covers three chapters in the Torah – Numbers chapters 22, 23 & 24. At the moment, we're up to Chapter 23 and the 1<sup>st</sup> of Balaam's Oracles. Before I begin, I want to share something about what has motivated me to concentrate on the Book of Numbers.

(WHY I DO IT)

- This is the 22<sup>nd</sup> presentation on the Book. I initially started out 2 ½ years ago on this Book because **Christ is in this story and I want to proclaim Him to the church**
- I wanted to make good presentations that reveal Christ in the Book. But it has gradually dawned on me that there is *also* ANOTHER motivation driving me and it is coming more and more to the forefront. **It is that I may get to know Christ better.**
- In my research, I do want to understand what went on with the Israelites as God led them thru the wilderness & the

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types of problems they caused themselves – because we tend to make the same types of mistakes

- But more importantly, I want to know *the GOD Who is leading them*, what the sacrificial system tells me about HIM AND ME, how He is faithful to keep His promises, how He protects His Holiness, how He corrects the people, and how HE must take the initiative if I am to dwell with Him.
- I want to learn this because He is the **exact same God with Whom I am interacting today!**
- If I make the greatest presentation ever heard in CCC but remain a baby regarding knowing Christ, that's tragic.
- I firmly believe that developing presentations or meditations or whatever to share in women's or men's meetings is most beneficial to the one developing them. Seek Him while preparing – *“Lord, in what way can I know You more thru this effort? What are you saying to me about Yourself?”* Don't worry if the presentation bombs – the Deacons are not going to give you any more money for a great presentation than a rambling one. Either way, you would have moved closer to the Person that really matters.
- Sometimes, I lose sight of the fact that any move of the Holy Spirit **DEPENDS** on the Holy Spirit. What I say here either falls to the ground or rises to the heaven *solely by the action of the Holy Spirit.*

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- My ongoing prayer is that – God willing – **the Holy Spirit will use something that I say POORLY that will allow YOU to know Him better.**
- I'm not eloquent enough to allow you to **know** Him better – but the **Spirit is**.

OK – enough about me. Now, I want to give you a **heads-up** – several things I say today *may* be controversial. I don't purposely set out to cause controversy.

Don Rumble is much better at doing this in a graceful manner – he has a beard (authority), plays the guitar (sensitivity), and he as a more fuel-efficient vehicle which allows him to keep the motor running in his car.

Certain aspects of Oracle #1 press some issues we have been dealing with here. Since I don't believe in coincidences, I think we should talk a little about them today. As long as we are true to the Scripture, we'll be fine. OK? –

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SLIDE:

Here's a list of topics that we'll get into – some to a greater extent than others. All of these topics are prompted by what God said thru Balaam in Oracle #1.

- There are Mysteries behind the curtain
- Theology is not a curse word
- Hearing His voice
- Is God fair?
- Is God finished with Israel?
- What does it mean to die a righteous person?

Let's start by recalling an incident in the life of Christ when He was just a newborn.

SLIDE: Luke chapter 2 records the event of Mary & Joseph presenting Jesus in the Temple in keeping with the mandate that firstborn males had to be redeemed. We covered this back in Numbers Chapter 18. Now – it may seem odd to say that Jesus was “redeemed” – He wasn't being redeemed from *sin* (He was sinless) but from mandatory service in the Temple. All firstborns were the Lord's property, so to speak, and the Torah specified that your parents had to pay *5 silver coins* to the Priests, else the child would be required to serve the Priests and Levites in the Temple. Jesus was redeemed that day, as His service in His Father's house would be voluntary – not mandatory.

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As they were in the Temple, a man named Simeon suddenly appears – he is an old man whom God had promised that he would not see death before he saw the Messiah. Directed to come to the Temple THAT DAY by the Holy Spirit, Simeon sees the child and breaks into a beautiful prophesy –

“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; “For my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light, for revelation to the *Gentiles*, and for the glory of Your people Israel.”

- Here we have an example of a *prophetic word* coming thru a person who is not technically a Prophet (capital P). This is a forerunner of how the gift of prophesy normally works in the New Testament – I don't know of any Isaiahs today, but any one of us can be a Simeon on any given day as the Lord wills.
- Simeon says that can die in peace now that he has seen the Messiah – *that's kind of prophetic for us too, isn't it?*
- His reaction is a little amazing when you think of it – he has just read his own name in the obituaries and he's dancing a jig!

✚ God fulfilled His promise to Simeon to see Messiah before he died. *Simeon would to die the **death of the righteous** because of his fulfilled hope in the Messiah.*

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Now – I want to call your attention to two pieces of this great prophesy – because each is relevant to this presentation (as you will see). It says that God provided a LIGHT – this of course refers to Jesus the Messiah – for two related – but somewhat different – ends:

SLIDE: A LIGHT...

1. He will be for revelation to the Gentiles, and
2. He will be for the glory to His People Israel

For REVELATION to the Gentiles – Israel already had the revelation of the One True God but Gentiles didn't – Jesus would be the Light to reveal Yehovah's majesty.

*& The Light will be For THE GLORY of His people Israel.*

We'll see how this plays out in history in a moment. But just keep this in the back of your mind: Jesus is the Light for revelation for the Gentiles and for the glory of God's people Israel.

OK: On to Balaam. Let's briefly recap what happened in Chapter 22.

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**SLIDE: BALAAM AND BALAK**

In Numbers Chapter 22, two individuals are suddenly introduced into Jewish history – Balaam and Balak. Who are these guys? Balaam is the sorcerer for hire. Balak, who tradition says he himself was a minor sorcerer in his own right, is the King of Moab. He's looking at 3 million Israelites camped in his backyard, and he's scared. He is afraid not only of this large crowd of people but also of their God Yehovah. Balak was well aware – as was all the middle east – of what this God had done to the Egyptians 40 years ago, and he just recently witnessed up close what Israel had done to the Amorites – a nation that had been – until now – stronger than his.

- Balak realizes that, if Israel and Israel's God enter into the Promised Land, the balance of power, not just locally but worldwide – will *be altered forever*.

Balak wants to fight, but he is a *realist* – the Israelites are numerous and they have Yehovah's protection. Balak is also very *discerning* – he realizes that this will be primarily a *spiritual battle*. But – how can he fight a spiritual battle when his god Baal has been hiding under his desk as soon as the first Israelite scout entered the valley?

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SLIDE: HAVE CURSES, WILL TRAVEL

Well – like all businesses today, when you're stuck not knowing what to do – you hire a consultant. So, Balak turns to a famous witch, a renowned manipulator of spiritual forces, to do battle in the *spiritual realm* so that Israel might be defeated in the *physical realm*. His weapon – Balaam's power of cursing.

Balaam is a puzzling character. Some think that he was a true prophet of God who went astray. Others think he was just another religious husker that abound on TV today. If you just read Chapters 22–24, you'll probably come away with the impression that he's somewhat is a neutral participant; while he is definitely fond of money, he does show deference to Yahweh, he apparently doesn't personally hate the Israelites, and some people speculate that he was actually a Gentile prophet of God (like Job), but that he went astray for a time.

- But other parts of the Old Testament describe Balaam an enemy of both God and of Israel; he is an evil man whom God defeated; he is not a prophet, *although on this occasion he will speak words of prophesy*. – *note???*
- The Hebrew word *kesem/qecem* is used for the act of divination of a magician/sorcerer (i.e., 1 Sam 28:8).



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Both terms are applied to Balaam; **he is never called a navi, the Hebrew word for "prophet"**

- The NT mentions Balaam three times, all negatively. Both Peter and Jude describe him as the personification of greed in using religion for personal gain (II Peter 2:15; Jude 11). Most notably, Jesus criticizes the church at Pergamum for accepting what He calls “doctrine of Balaam” (Revelation 2:14).

**Balaam is an example of a type of individual that will arise during the last days immediately before Christ's return.**

Jesus warned us that the fact that there will be people who prophesize, perform miracles and cast out demons, perhaps even claim to be apostles – they sure *look and sound like* Christians full of the Holy Spirit – but the fact is that these manifestations do NOT guarantee their entry into the kingdom of heaven – only those who did the will of His Father would enter. “Then I will tell them plainly – (said Jesus), ‘I never **knew** you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” Matt 7:21–23).

Balaam sure sounds like a prophet of God – however, while he knew ABOUT Yehovah, Yehovah never knew him.

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So – don't picture Balaam dressed as a prophet – try to picture him as running round with a **pointy black hat and a book of spells.**

A COUPLE OF POINTS THAT I SKIPPED LAST TIME:

**1<sup>st</sup> – Q:** *why is Balaam anxious to go to Moab if God has placed him in verbal handcuffs – certainly he knows that what he will be permitted to say will not please King Balak.* Well –

- 1<sup>st</sup> of all, the love of money can make us do irrational things – and Balaam loves money.
- Secondly, Balaam is a diviner, and it was customary for diviners to bargain with the gods and get them on our side. Balaam thinks that he will be able to *persuade Yehovah to change His mind* about His promises to Israel.

➤ **That's his job - to get God to change His mind about His promises and thereby Balaam will collect a generous paycheck.**

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2<sup>nd</sup> – Q: *Why didn't Balaam just curse Israel from his home up in Pethor – why travel 400 miles to do it?*

Because, according to the pagan manual of cursing, you had to see the object of the cursing in order for it to be effective. Remember last time when we talked about how the pagan concept of gods was that gods controlled specific territory and their power *was limited to that territory*. Same with cursing.

This shows the comparative weakness of occult power. Remember when the Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant? Jesus says “let's go” but the centurion replied: “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.” (Matthew 8).

Jesus didn't need to go where the servant was, and yet the servant was healed. But Balaam, the most famous sorcerer in the world, needs to travel 400 miles on a donkey to do his cursing.

The night before Balaam starts on his journey, God tells him, *“IF the emissaries from King Balak come to you in the morning, you can rise up and go with them but you can only speak what I tell you to say.”* As Roy pointed out last time, there is nothing in God's Word that says that they *actually did come by and ask again*. Instead, it says that Balaam got up in the morning and saddled his donkey.

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- He was like Jack and Bud on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of deer hunting season.
- He's up, dressed and drinking his coffee in his pickup truck – with a silly grin on his face – before the rest of the civilized world is even awake.
- What do Jack and Bud have in common with Balaam during hunting season? They're all after the doe.

As Balaam is on his way to King Balak, we have the famous incident of the talking donkey and the Angel of the Lord blocking his path.

First we have the Saturday–Night–Live dialogue between Balaam and his donkey, and then Balaam is terrified by the appearance of the Angel of the Lord. Balaam is allowed to proceed to Moab with the warning that he may *only* speak what Yehovah tells him to speak. Balaam then arrives at Moab and meets King Balak.

SLIDE: BALAK TO BALAAM

“For I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed.” Numbers 22:6

Balak hired Balaam because of his renowned success with blessings and curses. Balaam wants the money, but he is

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still remembering the *Angel of the Lord* with the intimidating sword – so tells King Balak that he can only say what God allows him to say.

- Balak thinks – *Yeh, yeh – just do your job if you want to get paid.*

Three times, and from three different vantage points, Balak will get Balaam to attempt to pronounce a curse on Israel, but each time blessings are recited instead. And, like his donkey did to him, Balaam will speak words to Balak that are totally unexpected and very much unappreciated.

Balaam realizes that they have a problem; he comes from the general vicinity of Abraham's old neighborhood up in Mesopotamia; as a professional sorcerer, he would be well-aware of any such promises that were made by God. Balak, however, doesn't understand there is a problem.

**SLIDE: Balaam & Balak have a Problem**

Here's the problem. When Yehovah called Abraham to leave his home and journey to an unknown land, He had made certain promises to Abraham...

We read about this in Genesis 12:1–3:

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*Now the LORD had said to Abram:*

*"Get out of your country,  
From your family  
And from your father's house,  
To a land that I will show you.*

*I will make you a great nation;  
I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
And you shall be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you,  
And I will curse him who curses you;  
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

**God's CHARACTER is the real problem for Balak and Balaam –  
God is NOT like us humans or like the demons posing as  
gods. Yehovah doesn't break His promises or change His  
mind.** And He doesn't surrender to either flattery or bribery.

Balak also faces a danger that he apparently doesn't recognize -> not only will he not be able to curse Israel, but God also promised that anyone **WHO TRIED** to do so would themselves be cursed by Him.

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- The *consequences* of attempting to curse Israel are catastrophic – Balak doesn't realize that, and he & his nation will suffer the consequences.

EVERYONE IS A THEOLOGIAN

At this point, I want ask the first of several questions that *may* engender a negative reaction – at least initially. But – perhaps we can have a little fun with it. What I'm trying to do with this question – hopefully – is to get us to *think* about how we approach Scripture. OK?

SLIDE: Theology

➤ *Do you have to be a theologian to study the Bible?*

Click: Answer -- Yes

Is my answer a surprise? Here's why I say "yes":

SLIDE: Because everyone who "THINKS" about God is a "theologian".

✚ In thinking about God, you're DOING theology,

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So, my question is somewhat of a trick question. *Theology* is just a **fancy 50¢ word** to describe our attempt to understand the truth about what God has revealed about Himself and about us —that search is something *every* Christian does.

My YES answer to this question tends to solicit an almost hostile attitude from most Christians until I explain what I mean. The initial response is statements like...

- *“I don’t need all that doctrine — doctrine divides. All I need to know is Jesus.”*

In such a response, a person is **unknowingly espousing the DOCTRINE that they don’t NEED doctrine.**

*[I don’t see a lot of smiles out there. Perhaps this would help explain where I’m coming from]*

Whenever I hear such a declaration, my tendency is to ask a question: *“OK, Who is Jesus?”* As soon as you start to answer that question, you’re being a theologian and espousing a doctrine (teaching) about who Jesus is. It’s unavoidable.

- You ask a JW “who is Jesus”, and she’ll tell you that he is Michael the Archangel
  - Ask a Muslim– and he’ll tell you that Jesus was a great prophet – although not as great as



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Mohammed; He was a good man, but not God the Son, He didn't die on a cross & He isn't a savior because we don't need one.

- Ask a Mormon - he'll tell you that Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer, one of an innumerable number of gods in the universe
  
- Everyone - Christian, Buddhist, atheist, agnostic, Muslim, Jew, Hare Krishna, or anything else - everyone "does theology". Everyone has ideas about God: Who He is, how He acts in our world, and what it means for us.
- No Christian can avoid theology. Every Christian is a theologian. Perhaps not a theologian in the *technical* or *professional* sense, but a theologian nevertheless.
- When you think about God, you're a theologian. Your thoughts about Who the Father is, or about Jesus's atoning death on the cross, or the Holy Spirit's presence in your life are *theological thoughts*.
- It is not a question of whether we are going to engage in theology; it is a question of whether our theology is sound or unsound.

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Now, I know that – for many Christians – words such as *doctrine* and *theology* translate to intellectual pride, dissention, and the presumption that we can put God in a box, neatly explained by our categories and formulations. And unfortunately, that does happen far too often.

I think Bill did a great job several Sundays ago talking about the priority of concentrating on Jesus instead of the human inclination to concentrate so much on getting our doctrine correct that we *miss* Jesus.

**SLIDE:** Jesus Himself pointed out that *knowledge of the Bible* **does not necessarily equate to knowledge of Him**. He said to the Pharisees...

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; **it is these that testify about Me**; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. John 5:39–40

So, knowledge of the *Bible* is not the same as knowing *Him*. **Pride** has always been mankind's main weakness.

We all can fall into this trap. How tragically sad to miss Jesus in this way. I just mentioned the time when Mary & Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple. The priests and Levites were there – they were OT versions of elders and deacons. They probably told Mary and Joseph to line up over

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there, walk over here, stand there and other instructions as part of the religious ceremony.

- Here is the Savior right in front of the priests – the Light Who would be the Glory of Israel – and *they were too wrapped up in doing their religious thing to recognize Him.*
- We humans are all too skillful at perverting good things with our sinful tendencies – aren't we? **Pride places a VEIL over our eyes.**
- But – Satan is very sly – we can ALSO become *equally prideful* about our lack of carefully study. E.g., “*I'm very proud of the fact that I don't get hung-up with too much doctrine.*” (my example about “good presentation”?)

**SLIDE:** You see, the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of Jesus' statement to the Pharisees – that the Scriptures DO testify to Him and are there to help us COME TO HIM – to recognize His voice. – is equally true. “My sheep hear My voice.”

- Hearing His voice doesn't mean recognizing the *tone* of His voice. It's recognizing whether or not it is Jesus Who is speaking. Is what I'm hearing or sensing something He would say? **“Give us this day our daily Mercedes Benz?”**

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- ✚ We hear Jesus with SPIRITUAL EARS, not physical ones. A DEAF PERSON may not be able to *physically* hear when someone speaks, but – if a Christian – he/she can HEAR Jesus when **reading Scripture**.
- A PERFECT EXAMPLE happened just this week (coincidence?). Someone – “a moron” as Steve Kline describes them – set up a fake Facebook page pretending to be Bunny Otterbeck. Jennifer Ciccarelli (Bob & Janice oldest daughter & Angie’s sister) posted: “I fell for it. Then they started messaging me and I knew it wasn’t her.” Jennifer can recognize Bunny’s voice even in a WRITTEN message.
- I need to know what Christ *sounds* like when He is speaking to my spirit. HIS voice – not *my* voice, or the voice of the evangelist, or pastor or teacher or someone *pretending* to be Jesus.
- I’ve learned by personal experience that “*if it feels right, it MUST be Jesus*” is a very poor discernment strategy. It works sometimes, but *overly* relying on my emotions can easily be misleading – at my age, emotions depend a lot on the medication I’m taking.
- Neither can I *overly* depend on whether or not I have “peace” about something. Having peace is certainly nice, but not having peace doesn’t mean that God ISN’T saying

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something. Witnessing to relatives about Christ is *not* a peaceful experience for me – actually, it's an anxious time. *Jesus certainly did not have a peaceful night in the Garden of Gethsemane.*

- Peace often comes AFTER I do something that God is asking of me.
- Remember that Jonah had peace; he was so peaceful that he fell asleep in a boat during a hurricane while trying to run away from God's command to preach to Nineveh.
- We think it is Jesus because it feels right, or I feel peaceful?
- Why do I get into all this? Because – speaking for myself – It's all too easy to become complacent in my walk and think – *I DON'T NEED TO READ THE BIBLE PERSISTENTLY – Jesus is going to whisper in my ear and tell me everything I need to know – and I'll surely be able to recognize His voice.* Well – that's being very naive.
- I cannot emphasize this enough. In order for us to be BETTER at recognizing His voice, we need know what He *SOUNDS like* – and that's found in **what He has ALREADY VOICED** – the SCRIPTURE.

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- So... **Forget** the words “*theology*” and “*doctrine*” if they are stumbling blocks to you! Call it what you want – as long as **do** theology by actively pursuing Him.
- Jesus is the Center of life – that is good theology;
  - Jesus is Head of this church – that is good theology.
  - Jesus Alone saves me by Grace Alone– that is good theology.
  - How do I know that is good theology? **Because Jesus said so in the Scripture.**

Everyone OK so far? We don't have to be afraid of the fancy **50¢** terms as long as we keep Jesus is our Center.

LUTHER & KNOWING GOD – PG. 119(?)

1. prayer
  2. meditation
  3. testing
- ➔ God allows you to be tested by the world and perhaps even by some people in the church – and God then seals that idea within you so it becomes a reality. (new creation?)”

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THE ORACLES

SLIDE: THE Oracles of Balaam...

Let's get into the Oracles. Balaam's pronouncements or oracles are contained in Numbers 23–24, and like I said last time, I consider these chapters perhaps the most captivating chapters on Divine Prophecy in the Old Testament

- And, I say 'captivating' partly because the several of the oracles are delivered under duress – Balaam is forced by God to prophesize.

Balaam pronounces a total of seven oracles. I'm going to concentrate on the first four, as they are the ones that deal with Israel, the character of God and the coming Messiah.

These oracles are **a Bible within a Bible**. Thru Balaam's lips, Yahweh declares His character, His unchangeableness, His faithfulness, His ongoing love of His people, and the coming Messiah.

- If you were an Israelite, you could take these oracles – just by themselves – memorize them, and end up knowing the character of Yehovah, loving Him and looking forward to the coming Messiah.

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God had promised Abraham three things:

1. Land
2. Numerous descendants, and a
3. Covenant relationship

Balaam's 1<sup>st</sup> Oracle will be a declaration of how God see Israel *differently* than any other nation and note how numerous they are; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Oracle is about the character of Yehovah and His covenant relationship with Israel. The 3<sup>rd</sup> mentions how Israel will soon enjoy peace and prosperity in the Promised Land.

Then, there is a 4<sup>th</sup> Oracle – a vision – that describes a coming Israelite king (who is David) and a future Messiah (Jesus).

**SLIDE:** The term “*oracle*” may seem somewhat odd – “*he took up his oracle*”(v.3)

Since divination is strictly forbidden by God, why would Balaam take up his “oracle”? We NORMALLY associate the word ‘oracle’ with pagan divination and the occult, such as the Oracle at Delphi where a priestess of Apollo communicated messages from the gods while in a trance.



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Perhaps the word “oracle” is not the best. The word translated *oracle* in this verse is actually ‘*mashal*’, the Hebrew word for *proverb, parable, and words of ethical wisdom or a discourse*. The KJV, ASV, DBY, and HNV all use the word *parable* rather than *oracle*. The NIV translates it as *message*. NASB uses *discourse*. So, pay your nickel and take your choice – I’m going to use ‘oracle’ only because – historically – many translations do.

THINGS GOING ON “OUT OF SIGHT”

Now – It’s not apparent until you think about it – the Israelites had *no clue* to what was going on with Balaam and Balak in the mountains overlooking their encampment.

Neither Moses nor any other Israelite was on the mountain. So, we have a situation somewhat similar to what happened with Job, where the real **action** is hidden *UNSEEN*.

- **Please make a note of this** – spiritual activity is always going on behind the scene – Scripture calls these things *MYSTERIES* – it is **an important point to remember** when we start to question what God is doing.

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We don't often think about it, but *we ourselves* are sometimes in the middle of an *INVISIBLE BATTLE* and do not realize it.

- Ephesians 6:12 alludes to this: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."
  - Things aren't always as they appear, but God is always in control.

**SLIDE:** Now, in these Oracles, Yehovah God speaks thru Balaam in two different ways:

- Oracles 1 & 2 – God puts Words in Balaam's *mouth*
- Oracles 3 & 4 – God puts Words in Balaam's *spirit*.

In the first two instances, Balaam is forced to speak what Yehovah tells him to speak. All of us have seen **red-lettered Bibles** where the *spoken words of Jesus* are printed in red letters so as to make them stand out.

OK – that's the NT. If you were doing a red-letter version of the OT to highlight the *spoken words of Yehovah*, these two Oracles should be in red. This is also important to remember – these are *God's words*, not Balaam's. Balak

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makes the mistake in thinking they're Balaam's when they are not.

✚ A side note: If you have tried to understand parts of the Bible but it is difficult to hear His voice, you're certainly not alone. I recommend that you concentrate on the words of Jesus in the gospels – get a red-lettered Bible if you have to. *Lord, what are you saying to me in this passage? I want to know You.*

OK – The 2<sup>nd</sup> two oracles are somewhat differently – they are more aligned to standard inspired prophesy as we think of it – God still is speaking thru the person, but this time the words are not forced upon the person *against his will* but flow out of inspiration.

OK – let's read Balaam's 1<sup>st</sup> Oracle in which Yehovah declares **just how special He views Israel among the nations.**

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SLIDE; Oracle 1 – Israel is not like any other nation

**Numbers chapter 23** “Balaam said to Balak, “Build me seven altars here, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams.”<sup>2</sup> So Balak did just as Balaam had said. Balak and Balaam then offered on each altar a bull and a ram.<sup>3</sup> Balaam said to Balak, “Station yourself by your burnt offering, and I will go off; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatever he reveals to me I will tell you.” Then he went to a deserted height.

<sup>4</sup> Then God met Balaam, who said to him, “I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram.”<sup>5</sup> Then the LORD put a message in Balaam's mouth and said, “Return to Balak, and speak what I tell you.”

<sup>6</sup> So he returned to him, and he was still standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab.<sup>7</sup> Then Balaam uttered his oracle, saying,

“Balak, the king of Moab, brought me from Aram,  
out of the mountains of the east, saying,  
'Come, pronounce a curse on Jacob for me;  
come, denounce Israel.'

**<sup>8</sup> How can I curse one whom God has not cursed,  
or how can I denounce one whom the LORD has not denounced?**

<sup>9</sup> For from the top of the rocks I see them;  
from the hills I watch them.

**Indeed, a nation that lives alone,  
and it will not be reckoned among the nations.**

<sup>10</sup> Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
Or number the fourth part of Israel?  
**Let me die the death of the upright,  
and let the end of my life be like theirs.”**

<sup>11</sup> Then Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but on the contrary you have only blessed them!”<sup>12</sup> Balaam replied, “Must I not be careful to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?”

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SLIDE: SACRIFICE

OK – Balaam tells Balak to prepare seven altars on which to sacrifice seven bulls and seven rams – 14 valuable animals. The purpose is to help Balaam in his negotiations with Yehovah.

There were two basic reasons behind sacrifices in ancient societies.

- 1) Heathen/Pagan societies – the offerings of animals – and sometimes humans – were made in order to **bribe the gods** in order to **gain personal benefits** for the person *making* the sacrifice.

CLICK – 2) **Sacrifice in the Torah** – Torah sacrifice was completely different. God required animal sacrifices primarily to provide a *temporary covering of sins* and to foreshadow the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ (Leviticus 4:35, 5:10). Animal sacrifice is an important theme found throughout Scripture because “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22).

- The reason that a pagan offered *valuable* sacrifices was to show how serious he was about his request – **that’s the pagan mentality of bartering with the gods** – the high the value of the sacrifice, the greater benefit you’d receive. In this case, Balak was attempting thru Balaam

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to get Jehovah to change His mind by offering Him a bribe.

- It sounds silly to think we can change God's mind in such a manner; knowing the character of our Holy God, *trying to bribe Him is stupid*. But--- when you think about it, we all have done it in one way or another.

- *God, if you let me win the lottery, I'll give half to charity....*
- *If you stop this toothache, I promise never to swear again.*
- *If I can find a good parking spot today, I'll give up smoking for a week - (then as soon as you find a spot, you say, "never mind, I found one".)*

- *"God - I'll trade You this if You'll give me that."*  
→ this is the pagan's mentality

The offering of 14 valuable animals was an attempt to bribe Yehovah. But - we're dealing with the Real God here. They were accustomed to dealing with fallen angels masquerading as gods - Paul tells us that in 1 Cor 10:20-21: "...the sacrifices of pagans are **offered to demons**, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons."

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- Now – Logically, *spiritual* beings do not need *physical* food – especially burnt food
- Although burnt food can be very tasty once you get used to it – MY MOTHER'S COOKING

OK – if the “so-called” gods didn’t need the food to eat, *what was IN this barter system for them?* Answer: The Worship and Allegiance from the person making the sacrifice.

- Worship and allegiance from a human being -> worship & allegiance from a creature made in God's image.
- Satan could brag to God – “*they're worshipping me and not You*”. – It's like strutting around after making a basket. Ultimately, it gains Satan nothing. But the logic of a pathologically-evil mind is in play here.

**SLIDE:** THE Barter Principle *I will do this if you will do that...*

- Recall Satan's temptation to Jesus in the desert: Matthew 4:8-10 “Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus

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said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

Satan's offer to Jesus was a barter arrangement – In exchange for a few words of worship, Jesus would be given the kingdoms of the world. Just a small compromise on Jesus' part was needed...

- **Worship and allegiance – That's what Satan in his pride wants, to be the object of pagan worship.**

WE WILL be tempted

Just as *Jesus* was tempted in this way, *we also* can expect that Satan will tempt us in a similar way. Sometimes, these temptations are very *obvious* and thus easy to spot.

- However, it's the **SUBTLE** enticements that have the outward appearance of piety & spirituality that have been the most effective down thru the ages. As the Lord said to Cain: "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you..."
- The most successful temptations appeal to the human desire – craving for health, wealth & power. They are most effective on Christians when they are



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disguised in spiritual terminology. A poison apple  
*cloaked in a prophet's robe* –

- Here's an example: you turn on TV and you'll hear, "*plant a monetary seed with my ministry and you'll open God's storehouse*".
- It sounds kosher – it's cloaked with piety; – you plant a financial seed and you'll get a reward because God promises you a great harvest.
  - Well, God does keep His promises, **but** He knows when the primary motive is *greed*, and He will not be treated with such disrespect – **no matter how pious the preacher is – or pretends to be.**
  - That's God's unchanging Holy Character – He cannot be *talked into answering prayer that is motivated by greed.*
  - How easy theology sometimes is: if you agreed with the statement "God cannot be bribed" – you have just been practicing theology.

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SLIDE – ORACLE 1

OK – Balaam instructs King Balak to piously stand beside the seven altars and *he will go alone* to have a word with Yehoveh. Balaam then *tells the Lord* that he has sacrificed 14 valuable animals.

Now that's funny to me – He tells God that the sacrifice was made – – you'd think that Balaam would have thought that God *already knew* what happened, but we're dealing with a man who is only familiar with the limitations of the “*so-called gods*”.

Well – The *Lord completely ignores Balaam's attempt at bribery*. Instead, He tells Balaam to go back and say to King Balak *exactly* what He tells him. Balaam goes back to the where the King has been patiently waiting.

Now – Balaam *still* wants the money, but he also remembers that the Angel of Yehovah has a very intimidating sword, and the Angel is probably standing right next to him, so Balaam will do as he is told – ***he may be a witch, but he's not stupid.***

So he begins...

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SLIDE: HOW CAN I CURSE?

Balaam starts off by saying...

Verse 8: "How can I curse one whom God has not cursed, or how can I denounce one whom Adonai has not denounced?"

It's a rhetorical question. "I can't do it". All of a sudden, the smile starts to fade from Balak's face. *Is this true? Or is this just a negotiation tactic by Balaam for more money? This is not what I'm paying for.*

SLIDE: IF GOD IS FOR US...

*He who blesses you I will bless, and he who curses you I will curse.*

The God of the OT is the God of the NT – and implication of God's statement can be seen in the NT in Romans 8... If God is for us, who can be against us?

"... in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Amen!

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**SLIDE: ISRAEL IS SEPARATE**

Next, God – thru Balaam's mouth – broadcasts to all who could hear exactly how He Jehovah sees Israel: Verse 9: "Indeed, a nation that lives alone, and it will not be counted among the nations"

- Israel is not like any other nation – still true today, trust me, God is working out His work. That's why all nations have their eyes on Jerusalem –

Living apart – **separate**. We came across this idea previously when we touched on God's holiness. The Hebrew word for Holy (Kadosh) means 'separate'. God is Holy and must be treated completely different that we treat anyone else. Israel likewise must act differently than every other nation.

**SLIDE: LEVITICUS 20**

"You are to be 'holy' to Me because *I, ADONAI, am 'holy'*, and I have set you apart from the nations to be My own."

- Separate to Me – holy **TO** Me, a Holy Nation!

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**SLIDE: TWO PEOPLES IN THE WORLD**

God here is making a declaration to the world about HOW He sees things: **there is Israel, and then there is everybody else.** Remember, this is God's statement thru Balaam's mouth, this is not just Balaam's opinion.

- God says that Israel is a people who will dwell apart and not be reckoned as among the *goyim* (nations).

Israel in the OT is referred to as God's "people", His "*ammi*"; and all other people on the planet (gentiles) are called "nations", *goyim*.

Up to now, the Hebrew term 'Goyin' referred to all nations in general. From now on, *Goyim* will refer specifically to *gentiles* or *gentile nations*. It no longer includes the Hebrew people or Hebrew nation. Just like the Tribe of Levi was separated away from the other 12 Tribes of Israel to be special to Yehovah, so too is Israel separated from all other nations.

**Israel is entirely different from *everyone else* in God's eyes/**

- NOT BETTER than gentiles, but distinct from gentiles and with a distinct purpose (– which they didn't realize yet – they would bring forth the Messiah).

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We see this “separating” phenomenon many times in Scripture; our God is a God of creation and then division. He creates out of nothing, and then He divides or separates one thing from another.

- He separated light from darkness
- He separated the land from the waters
- He told the serpent that: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed.” (Gen 3:15)
- We are all, by virtue of original sin, the seed of the serpent. God’s promise is that he will call some of us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light, and our nature will be change by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It’s us and them. Like night and day, land and sea, it’s us and them.

- God chooses and separates. God chose Israel and set them apart. – and since He is sovereign, He doesn’t have to ask our permission!

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SLIDE: IS GOD FAIR?

- ?? Example of fairness and something going on behind the scenes: Joke: test results, fairness? Assumption choice is made just on race? Question #10: A> I don't know A. Neither do I!

I want to ask another question that – on its surface – is not initially as confrontational as the previous one about theology. *Is God fair?*

The great majority of Christians have a knee-jerk response to this question – “OK course, God is fair!” OK – let's consider a follow-up question: *“Is God being fair when He chooses one group or person over another for no apparent reason?”*

- Israel – that chronic bunch of complainers – were the chosen people and everyone else in the world was not.
- Jacob was chosen and his twin brother Esau was not, and the choice was mad when they were in their mother's womb – before they did anything.
- God grants one person health, another is seriously ill.
- Fortune falls into one person's lap by being born into a wealthy family; another is born poor, works hard but is still poor.

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- God chooses to save some and not all.
- *Is God fair?* It's an unspoken question that we all sometimes ask but usually push to the back of our minds. *Why, God?* The thing that really bugs us is that God usually doesn't explain *why* He does something or allows something. He is making choices that- if I was in His position - *would not make*.
- Well, given that god is a God of love, what are my options? Either my sense of fairness is flawed, either that or I don't have all the facts - or perhaps both.
- Why am I even bringing up this issue?
  - First, because whatever the answer is, it is a *theological* issue that speaks to the unchanging character of God - thus, we should look at it.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> - because Oracle 1 does talk about how He considers Israel as special & different from all other nations.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> - because many people today - *although they might not say it aloud* - do think that SOME of God's choices - if indeed they are God's choices - ARE UNFAIR.



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- In today's culture, we embrace **inclusion and fairness** – we tout environmental justice, social justice, gender equality, affirmative action – all supposedly will level the playing field. People tend to get upset when one person or group is treated differently than another.
- Even in golf, we assign “handicaps” according to skill in order to help level the playing field.
- Now, these things are not wrong in intent – I certainly need all the help I can get in golf – but our culture takes fairness to another level.
- Like – saying there's only One Way for salvation is so old-testament thinking. God loves everyone now – there **MUST** be multiple way to God.
- Or – *How dare someone say that the Jews were God's chosen people – they were no better than anyone else. God COULDN'T have made such a choice, because THAT WOULD BE UNFAIR!”*
  - Well, it's true that they WERE no better than anyone else. BUT the fact remains that God did make such a choice. **It's a matter of GRACE!** We think such an honor should be EARNED! But...
  - GRACE means that the Honor is NOT earned!

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WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

Remember Jesus' parable about a man hiring workers for his vineyard? He hired people at various times during the day; when it came time for giving out wages, the ones that only worked an hour received the same amount as those who worked all day. THAT'S UNFAIR said the workers who worked all day. WHY, said the owner of the vineyard? You agreed to a certain wage, why do you have a problem with my generosity to these others?

- Jesus highlights that God's outlook on GRACE wrangles human sensibility. We think God's rewards should be *earned*.

This has always been a weakness in our spiritual armor. Remember *Satan's words to Eve* in the Garden: "God told you not to eat of the fruit because He doesn't want you to be as great as He is" – in other words, He's being UNFAIR!

Balaam: Oracle #1

HARDEN YOUR HEART

- Sometimes when we read that God hardened someone's heart – like Pharaoh – we ask: “Is that fair?”
- Well – Paul tackles that question in Romans Chapter 9: where he writes: “...*God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*”  
Romans 9
- God *doesn't* harden a person's heart against their will. Think about it – **before you were saved**, there were things that you *DIDN'T DO* – not because you didn't *want* to do them but you *were afraid* of the consequences if you did it.
  - However, if somehow that fear of consequences was removed, *you're likely to do it.*
- That's what happens when your heart is hardened by God – God removes the fear of adverse consequences so that you can do what – **deep down – you really *want to do.***
- So God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh would resist (which is what Pharaoh really wanted), and God would demonstrate His power thru miracles.

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PINOCCHIO.

- Consider the fairness question in the context of the Scriptural statement that God elects some people and not all. Think about the story of PINOCCHIO. Runaway boys are gradually turned into donkeys at an amusement park called Paradise Island. Right? Well, that's a bit like us; everyone voluntarily gets on the train to some mythical Paradise Island just like the boys did. Now, if God chooses to entice a few people off the train – perhaps even DRAG THEM OFF LIKE IN MY CASE – and save them to Himself while leaving the others to continue on to the park, is He being unfair? Remember, the people originally got on the train because they want to.
- That's part of Paul's underlying argument – **God isn't mandated to take everybody off the train when they are there voluntarily – and they're quite happy to be there!**
- Now – I know that this discussion whether or not God is fair can sound somewhat academic – whereas we live in the real world. OK – Here's a practical example. Let's see how much the idea of God's Fairness really means to us – and *I'm being a little wicked right now*. So, the Question is: Is God sometimes Unfair? OK – for the sake of this example – “Let's suppose that God is unfair at times – which He is not – but just suppose He is. He

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chose YOU for salvation and NOT YOUR NEIGHBOR, even though your neighbor leads a far-more Godly life than you do. *Who here would be willing to give up your salvation in protest that God *unfairly* choose you for salvation and not your neighbor?"* No one, I suspect. Kind of makes the fairness issue somewhat moot.

- But, God is Sovereign – and there are things about Him that we can never fully understand. God is also Holy, and even when we can't understand why He is doing something, my best theological advice is to rest in the fact that He is Love, He keeps His promises, we don't know all the facts, and He is NEVER unfair. This is just another issue we'll have to wait to ask about when we see Jesus face to face.

OK... on to verse 26 of Oracle 1:

SLIDE: COUNT THE DUST

In Verse 26: God asks another a rhetorical question thru Balaam's lips: "Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel?"

The obvious conclusion is that there's a lot of Israelites – so many, it is almost impossible to count! Here, Yehovah

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SLIDE: COUNT THE DUST

... And I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone is able **to count the dust of the earth**, then your descendants also can be counted."

Genesis 13:16

God is repeating what He said to **Abraham 500 years** earlier about the number of Abraham's descendants. Remember – at that time, Abram was elderly, living in Canaan, *he had no children*, and his wife Sarai was way beyond child-bearing age. Now, the crowd on the plain below is over 3 million.

Try to picture it – Abraham – 100 years old, stooped over & banging away on something... what are you building? Mumble... What – I couldn't hear you? "A CRADLE!"

SLIDE: PASCAL & PROOF FOR THE SUPERNATURAL

- *Why, the Jews your majesty, the Jews.*

READ the slide – After their expulsion from the land by the Romans, the Jews wandered as strangers who were persecuted from every side. Yet, against all odds, they continued as a people and a religion. Not only have they survived, but many of the nations that persecuted them—

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Moab, Ammon, Edom, Philistia, and many others—have completely lost their individual identity.

Have you ever heard of a Swedish Moabite? A Russian Philistine? A German Edomite? An American Jebusite? No! These people have been totally absorbed into other cultures and races.

However, we **CAN** find a Swedish Jew, a Russian Jew, a German Jew, and an American Jew. As prophesied, the Jews have not lost their identity.

And the continued existence of the Jews is a proof that God exists and that He keeps His promises –

OK – Let's QUICKLY wrap up this first Oracle.

**SLIDE: DIE AS RIGHTEOUS**

Verse 10: "Let me die the death of the upright, and let the end of my life be like theirs."

- Yehovah is bringing to Balaam's consciousness his personal – but long unspoken wish – a wish that we all have for ourselves – to die the death of the righteous. Now, Yehovah is prompting a softening of Balaam's

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heart that could lead to repentance – but would he respond?

- He did not. He momentarily had the Wish but he never grasped the Promise.

And yet, God did fulfill His promise to Simeon that he would see Messiah before he died. *Simeon would to die the death of the righteous because of his fulfilled hope in the Messiah*

We sang this song two week ago – *My Redeemer Lives*.

“Though my flesh it be destroyed  
Yet with my eyes I will see God  
For I know that my redeemer lives  
And I will stand with Him on that day”

Do you know where this is from – The OT Book of Job. He says that – even though he dies – he knows that He will see God his Redeemer, & he'll be standing with Him. He will *stand* with His Redeemer.

That's our hope also – that at the end of our life – God willing – we will have a welcome home kiss from God because of our faith in the Messiah.

God keeps His promises... Amen...