

Balaam: Oracle #3 Part II: How Lovely are your Tents

SLIDE: Good Morning, Saints!

[Note: the audio of this message does not address all portions of this pdf due to time constraints.]

Today, we're going to look at Chapter 24 of the Book of Numbers and Balaam's third Oracle. Balaam – a pagan sorcerer – has a vision from El Shaddai.

- 'El Shaddai' – *the God of Power*. This Name goes back to a time before the burning bush, a time before the Lord told us His personal formal Name YAHWEH.

God Almighty. God has no limits to His power. He can do anything, and He can do anything as easily as He can do anything else.¹ It is no more difficult for God to create a universe than to make a butterfly – no more difficult. He can do anything and He can do anything as easily as He can do anything else. Absolutely no effort.

You probably know that Michael Card and John Thompson composed a worshipful Christian song entitled “*El Shaddai*”. I find it haunting and beautiful.

El Shaddai, El Shaddai, El Elyon na Adonai
Age to age You're still the same
By the power of Your name.

¹ R.C. Sproul

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Last time, if you remember, we discussed the overall concept of Prophecy as it is described in Scripture and as it continues today. **Prophecy is speaking the truth about God or from God.** We looked at the two major types of prophecy:

- #1. The unique type of prophecy that is the “very word of God”² communicated to the nation or church – this is what I labeled as Prophecy with a Capital ‘P’. This type of prophecy had to have complete doctrinal integrity and be 100% accuracy in its predictions. This is what we see with Isaiah, John the Baptist, and so on – people who held the Office of Prophet.
- #2. Then, there is congregational prophecy – small ‘p’ – that exhorts, encourages and comforts the local body of Christ. We all can function as prophets in this sense, as the Holy Spirit leads.

We also looked at the current – but **unsound** – assertion that there is a 3rd type of prophecy in action today. This type is said to contain some truth and some non-truth – it is not pure and it is up to us to decide which is which. This concept is promoted by those who I call the Neo-prophets – these are individuals who *claim* to have the gift of prophecy and thus

² When someone states that the Bible *contains* the word of God but is not the word of God are made, it is done so usually because the person wants to assert that the original documents in the Bible contained errors. Such an erroneous assertion undermines the very trustworthiness of God's Word – and it is untrue also! <https://carm.org/bible-isnt-word-god-it-contains-word-god>

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merit the status and authority of a prophet to the wider church; however, they do NOT want to be held to the 100% accuracy and doctrinal integrity criteria established by God.

Unlike these new prophets, true prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah were never hesitant nor did they issue disclaimers that their prophecies were a mixture of human imagination and God's words.³ Rather, their prophecy was always doctrinally pure and 100% accurate. Today's neo-prophet is seldom accurate and almost always doctrinally tainted. This doesn't bother them, however, because they grab a fig leaf to cover themselves – the claim that God has changed His mind on His criteria for modern prophecy. This claim, however, is a direct contradiction of Numbers 23:19, wherein God says that He does NOT change His mind.

Any prophecy or vision for the wider church that is not doctrinally pure or 100% accurate is bogus. Any prophecy or vision what promotes the concept of hidden wisdom available only to elite Christians is bogus; it is a blatant rehash of the Colossian heresy. Paul says don't be taken captive to such words. The one who gives such a prophecy or vision shows himself/herself to be a false prophet – be they unintentionally false or not.

³ E.g.; Rick Joyner (*The Vision*) – discussed in the previous session.

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OK → ON TO ORACLE 3.

The Bible begins with a majestic assumption that it does not try to prove – God is a Personal Being. And being a Personal Being, He interact with us and reveals things about Himself. And many of the characteristics He reveals to us are characteristics that we would NOT have assumed.

- You see, all of us like to consider ourselves as the main character in the play. Thus, God *must* be like us. But, when we read the actual script of the play, we find that the author says that He is NOT like us. God is not just a larger version of us (which is the way pagans saw the gods). He does not lie, He does not change His mind and He keeps all promises that He makes.

And, God had made promises concerning certain things that He would do for Abraham and his descendants. Balaam has tried **twice** to change Yehovah's mind but is forced to admit his powerlessness to do so. Balak – the King of Moab who hired Balaam to curse Israel – still doesn't understand that there is any problem at all. He's figuring that Balaam just may be holding out for more money.

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SLIDE: THE PROMISE

Here's the problem these two pagan's face. When Yehovah called Abraham to leave his home and journey to an unknown land, He promised him certain things: We read about this in Genesis 12:1-3:

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."**

Your descendants will become a great nation; thru you, all nations will be blessed; I will bless those who bless you & curse those who curse you.

That was over 600 years earlier from where we are now on the Plains of Moab! Balaam, as a professional sorcerer,

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would have knowledge of such promises – but these were made 600 years ago! Those people are long dead. And what god does not eventually yield to flattery and bribery? Is Yehovah like the other gods, or NOT? That was the question.

SLIDE: Perhaps the Third Time is the charm...

Now, King Balak doesn't give up easily. *'Let's give it one more try'*, he says, and takes Balaam to another place – the peak of a mountain called Peor. This is another pagan high place dedicated to the god Baal. Oracle 3 results from Balaam's third attempt to get Yehovah to change His mind.

Here we see the pagan mind at work; Balak understands that Yehovah is far mightier than his god Baal, but – as is the pagan mindset – he believes that all gods can be manipulated under the proper circumstances. Perhaps Balaam just needs to appease this 'Yehovah fellow' a tiny bit more.

- I am amazed that this guy Balak never seems to get the message. It's really ironic – here is a man who is willing to give a fortune to Balaam for his insight into the spirit world and for his connections of the gods, and yet, he never pays any attention to what Balaam is telling him about the situation and about the danger he Balak is in by even *trying* to curse Israel. Balak has understood absolutely nothing about the God of Israel.

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Off to the top of Mt. Peor they go, and I suspect that Balaam probably still holds a small hope – ever-shrinking thought it may be – that God *will* change His mind – else, why even try again? Another seven altars are built and a bull and ram are sacrificed on each of them, again a totally useless effort.

OK – let's begin by reading Oracle 3; I'll start at the end of chapter 23 of the Book of Numbers and continue into chapter 24:

< May the Lord be on my mind, on my lips and in my heart that I may present reveal the GREATNESS OF CHRIST and the GLORY OF GOD. >

SLIDE: 3rd Oracle from God: Numbers 23:27–24:13

23:27 Balak said to Balaam, "Come, please; I will take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God to let you curse them for me from there." ²⁸ So Balak took Balaam **to the top of Peor that looks toward the wilderness.** ²⁹ Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars here for me, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams." ³⁰ So Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Ch. 24:1 When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at the other times to seek for

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omens, but he set his face toward the wilderness.² When Balaam lifted up his eyes, he saw Israel camped tribe by tribe; **and the Spirit of God came upon him.**³ Then **he took up his oracle:**

"The **ORACLE** of Balaam son of Beor;
the oracle of **THE MAN WHOSE EYES ARE OPEN;**
⁴ the oracle of the **ONE WHO HEARS THE WORDS OF GOD,** who sees a vision from the Almighty,
although falling flat on the ground with eyes open:

How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel! "Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the Lord, like cedars beside the waters. Water will flow from their buckets; their seed will have abundant water.

"His king will be greater than Agag; his kingdom will be exalted.

"God brings him out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox; He shall consume the nations, his enemies; He shall break their bones and pierce them with his arrows.

'He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?' "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!"

¹⁰Then Balak's anger burned against Balaam. He struck his hands together and said to him, "I summoned you to curse my enemies, but you have blessed them these three times.

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Now leave at once and go home! I said I would reward you handsomely, but the Lord has kept you from being rewarded."

Wow – quite an incident!

SLIDE: DIVINE DISSING

I find it humorous how the Holy Spirit has Balaam progressively diss Balak in these oracles:

- In Oracle 1 = Balak is addressed as the "KING of Moab"
- In Oracle 2 (the 2nd attempt at cursing) = he is referred to merely as the "son of Zippor" (i.e.; *just a man*)
- In Oracle 3 here, Balak is completely IGNORED.
- And in Oracle 4, Balak continues to be ignored but is informed that his kingdom will be "crushed".

OK – After the 1st two oracles, Balak remained clueless, but Balaam is finally starting to catch on; this 3rd time, he stops looking for omens from God after the sacrifices. **What happens in this 3rd oracle is as startling to him as when, after**

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beating his donkey, his eyes were opened to see a very dangerous angel standing in his path holding a sword.

SLIDE – Ruach Elohim –

Verse 2 says: “When Balaam lifted up his eyes, he saw Israel camped tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God (Ruach Elohim) came upon him.”

Ruach Elohim - the Spirit of God – the SAME phrase we see in Genesis Chapter 1: The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God (Ruach Elohim) was moving over the surface of the waters.

From now on, the inspiration from God will come to him in a profoundly different manner than in the previous two oracles.

SLIDE – COMPARISON OF ORACLES

Up to now, the Lord God has literally told Balaam exactly what to say – it was like Balaam has an invisible teleprompter and he had to keep to the script under penalty of death. But this time, the Spirit of God comes upon Balaam and now he sees the truth and the certainty of God’s love for

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Israel. He no longer speaks robotically what God has *forced* him to speak; now he sees the reality of the situation and the utter futility of trying to get Yahweh to change His mind about them.

What we have occurring here in the 3rd Oracle is more like what we normally associate with prophecy and how Scripture was written. God does not *necessarily* give a person the *precise* words to say – although sometimes He does; most times, God *impresses* the truth about a situation upon a person's mind and spirit. The individual then uses his/her own words to convey the truth – and somehow God GUARANTEES that what is said or written is the absolute true.

➤ Amazing!

The Apostle Peter wrote: "No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men **carried along by the Holy Spirit** spoke from God." 2 Peter 1:20-21

Balaam was carried along by the Holy Spirit and spoke truth from God – and he was a pagan sorcerer!

A Truly amazing incident!

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SLIDE HIS EYES WERE OPEN

verses 3–4 read: “The oracle of Balaam son of Beor; the oracle of the man **whose eyes are open**; the oracle of the one **who hears** the words of 'El', who sees a vision from 'Shaddai', although falling flat on the ground **with eyes open**...”

That old witch gazes out upon the encampment of Israel **and the Holy Spirit hits him**. Balaam's knees buckle and he lies face down on the ground; he enters a state of ecstasy like Isaiah often did. This is the first time in his life that he directly encounters the true majesty of Yehovah – Isaiah and other prophets experienced this at times. Isaiah could only say – *“I am undone”*.

- There's no **laidback** attitude here – there's no attempt at high-fives with the Lord and calling Him your buddy – Balaam encounters God as an overwhelming Reality unlike anything he's experienced before.

The verse says that His 'eyes were opened'. Have you ever tried to look out a window late at night? When it's very dark outside, we have a difficult time seeing things clearly in the yard – unless there's a full moon or a street light. What we *mostly* see in the window is *our own* reflection. But, when we look out the same window in the daytime, we can see things much clearer, and we also see things that we *never even knew* were there. The same is true in the spiritual

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dimension; Paul says that – until Christ returns – we look through a **glass darkly**– 1 Cor. 13:12.

Well, the light went on in Balaam's darkness, and he sees things as they really are – he SEES plainly and HEARS clearly. **He's face down on the ground and he can see all around him.** He makes it clear to whoever is listening that what he is about to say will be the absolute state of the world.

He speaks, but he doesn't address Balak – it's almost as if he is no longer aware that Balak is even there. Balaam speaks TO THE FUTURE – TO US.

Now – the statement that the Spirit “*came upon*” him does *not* mean that Balaam was filled with the Holy Spirit as the disciples were at Pentecost, nor that he received a special anointing of the Spirit as when John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus.

Here, we have the Spirit acting in a manner that is more comparable to what happened to the **Prophet Elisha's servant.** Remember, the servant was terrified because the king's soldiers surrounded the city where they were staying and intended to arrest/harm both him and Elisha. 2 Kings 6:17 says – “And Elisha prayed, “**Open his eyes, LORD,** so that he

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may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and **saw** the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

- The servant wasn't *'filled'* or *'anointed'* with the Holy Spirit. Rather, he merely had his eyes opened to clearly see the entirety of the real world at that moment. The main difference between that situation and this with Balaam is that Balaam is in an ecstatic trance.

It's important to notice also that Balaam's oracle is NOT the usual faltering type of self-serving statement that we hear from the pretend prophets of today – who utter statements accompanied by disclaimers or their imaginary accounts of trips to heaven where angels bow to them because they're so humble. No – Balaam will not need to equivocate or boast or make excuses for inaccuracies because there will BE no inaccuracies and there's no boasting about yourself when you actually confront The Almighty God. **How far our sensibilities have been dulled that we receive modern prophecy as all that we should expect.**

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<SLIDE> EL SHADDAI

As I mentioned in the beginning of this presentation, Balaam is seeing a vision from 'Shaddai':

“The oracle of Balaam son of Beor; the oracle of the man whose eyes are open; the oracle of the one who hears the words of 'El', who sees a vision from 'Shaddai', although falling flat on the ground with eyes open...”

'El Shaddai' – This Name of God goes back to a time when men knew God as 'El Shaddai'. In chapter 6 of the Book of Exodus, it says:

“God spoke to Moses and said to him, 'I am Yahweh. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I appeared as El Shaddai, but I did not make my name Yahweh known to them'" (Exodus 6:2-3).

So, when God dealt with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He did not reveal His personal name, but He reveals His Name to Moses at the burning bush – YAHWEH.

Most Bible translations have historically translated 'El Shaddai' as 'God Almighty. Sometimes they translate it was the “many breasted one” – because the Hebrew word for 'breast' is 'shar'. This connotes a nurturing God. [Grand Teton mts?] However, scholars are now telling us that – due to very recent findings – they need to update their translation.

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<CLICK> In Hebrew, 'EL" is the word for God.

<CLICK> and Shaddai means Mountain. El Shaddai literally means "God of the Mountain".⁴

The God of Israel is almighty over all the pathetic gods to which paganism offers sacrifices on the sacred high places. The focus of the Name, however, does not seem to be so much on power and might (although that is implied) but **more on sovereignty and kingship**.

- So to me, what just happened with Balak and Balaam in the 3rd attempt to offer sacrifice is actually quite ironic and humorous. After offering the sacrifices on altars at the high place established to worship Baal, Balaam proceeds to announce that **there's been a mistake!** Baal is not in charge here, YAHWEH is! YAHWEH is the God of this place and every other high place. **And Yahweh doesn't extend any professional curtesy to Baal**. He is King of Hill – and nobody is going to push Him off! So, you have to deal with HIM! Amen.

I was surprised to learn that the name El Shaddai is found in the Book of Job more than in any other book of Scripture. Job spends most of the time questioning God, but God's eventual display of wisdom and power finally forces

⁴ Dr. Claude Mariottini – Professor of Old Testament <http://claudemariottini.com/2011/04/18/el-shaddai-part-1/>

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him to be silent. (R.C. Sproul) It is not necessarily wrong to question what the Lord is doing as long as we are not sinfully demanding that He justify Himself. God alone sees the entire picture and knows the end from the beginning and knows what He is doing. **I now that I should be silent before Him *far more often* than I ask questions of Him.** That's why it is called TRUST.

SLIDE: *Verse five, “How lovely (MA TOVU) are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!”*

This is an amazing text. Balaam's attempt to curse Israel turns to a blessing by the Spirit of Adonai. **MA TOVU** – *how lovely*. This is the first sentence of the *MA TOVU* prayer, which is the very first words of the **OPENING** prayer in **EVERY** Jewish Synagogue service.

It goes like this: “*How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!* (this was Balaam's statement). The prayer goes on: *As for me, O God abounding in grace, I enter your house to worship with awe in Your sacred place.*

O Lord I love the House were you dwell, and the place where your glory tabernacles. I shall prostrate myself and bow; I shall kneel before the Lord my Maker.

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To You, Eternal One, goes my prayer: may this be a time of your favor. In Your great love, O God, answer me with Your saving truth."

Not only are Balaam's words the opening words of the synagogue service, his words are the only words used in the liturgy that come from a Gentile.⁵

The purpose of the *Ma Tovv* prayer is to help worshippers get their attitudes ready before going into actual worship. You symbolically look out on the Israelite encampment like Balaam did and leave your personal baggage behind in preparation for passing over a bridge to the land where you will worship El Shaddai – the God of Glory and Might.

- *How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!"* – I have to tell you that this verse strikes me profoundly. And it prompts this next slide...

<SLIDE>: WHAT IS THE MOST DANGEROUS WEAPON IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD?

- Cluster bombs
- The mine
- The poison gas shell
- Tailored viruses

⁵ The remaining portions of the *Ma Tovv* prayer comes from the Psalms.

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➤ Iranian nuclear weapons??

Actually, none of these weapons.

<CLICK>: No – the most dangerous weapon in the eyes of the world is a fistful of nails and a hammer in the hands of a Jewish carpenter building a home in Israel.⁶

Balaam looked out on the plains of Moab and saw things as God saw them: How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, and your dwelling places, O Israel! - What a contrast to what we see today!

Iran will soon have a nuclear weapon, and besides Israel, and possibly Saudi Arabia, no one really cares about this very much.

- Oh, we'll hear politicians posture and *"speechify"* – as Davey Crocket would say – about how they guarantee that they will prevent that from ever happening, but no one believes that any longer.
- But let there be news that a Jew is adding on a bedroom to his house in Jerusalem for a new child, the international community tears its clothes and declares that such an act is totally irresponsible and a barrier to peace.

⁶ Daniel Greenfield @ the Sultan Knish blog, <http://sultanknish.blogspot.com/2012/12/the-deadly-israeli-house.html>

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The threatened genocide of the Jewish people is not worthy of much attention when compared to the fearsome weapon of terror of an Israeli family moving into a new apartment in Jerusalem.

- Please excuse me for this observation – I understand that it probably *sounds* political, but just because I'm pointing out the reality of a situation, it doesn't mean that it IS a political statement.

We tend to believe that God sees things the same way we do. But that's a big mistake. God resolutely states that... "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9). **We can't assume that our opinion on something must be His also.**

We can't assume that He would do a TV newscast as Walter Cronkite would. Throughout history, from the Plains of Moab to the Temple Mount today, the world sees Israel and Jews as one big pain in the neck. But God says "*I look out at them and I see beauty.*" God is NOT finished with Israel yet.

- o Make no mistake about what I am saying:
Salvation is ONLY thru Jesus – there is NO separate path to salvation available to the Jewish people.
But Paul says that one day the veil WILL be

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removed from their eyes and they will see clearly
and turn to their true Messiah.

OK: Let's move on to verse 7: "his king will be greater than Agag, and his kingdom will be exalted."

The verse says that the coming king will be greater than a current king named 'Agag'. Agag's exact identification is unknown, but evidently everyone at that time knew about him. In 1 Samuel 15:32–33 there is an account of the death of a king of the Amalekites named Agag – but that happened years later. It is possible that Agag was a popular name among the Amalekites. It is also possible that 'Agag' was actually a title that many Amalekite kings had, just as the title 'Pharaoh' was used by many Egyptian rulers.

Notice that the word "king" is singular. It doesn't say "kings". Remember – at this point in time, the only King Israel had was Yehovah. Since the verse uses the words "***will be greater*** that Agag" – it can't be a reference to Yehovah (Yehovah is obviously ***already*** greater than Agag); this is a prophecy about a coming King:

- 1st = David, and then
- Jesus.

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Verse 9 reads: "He crouches and lies down like a **LION**, and as a lioness, who can stir him? I DON'T THINK THIS NEEDS MUCH EXPLANATION. Balaam sees Israel as a Lion.

SLIDE: 'THEY' VERSES 'HE'

I want to point out something in this 3rd Oracle that is not immediately noticed but it directly relates to us today as Christians. In Oracle 2 and now in Oracle 3, Balaam prophecies – speaks God's mind – about similar things – but *there's a difference*.

In Oracle 2, the Holy Spirit says thru Balaam...

"The Lord their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of a wild ox.

Look, a people rises like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion that does not rest till it devours its prey and drinks the blood of its victims."

Notice that the Israelites are referred to here in the 3rd **person plural** – the text says THEIR God, THEY have, THEY rouse.

But, in Oracle 3, the Holy Spirit says:

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<CLICK> “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israell!

God brings him out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox; **He** shall consume the nations, his enemies; He shall break their bones And pierce them with his arrows. 'He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?'

“Blessed is he who blesses you, And cursed is he who curses you.”

The people are now referred to in the **third-person singular**, not plural. Some translations still retain the plural here, but the actual Hebrew is singular. It is *'he'* rather than *'they'*, *'him'* rather than *'them'*, *'Jacob'* rather than *'a people'*.

Do you see the difference? God loves us both individually and also as one body – the church. **Oracle 2 gives the facts – they are individuals; Oracle 3 reveals how God sees things – a unified entity.** The Israelite camp IS made up of numerous tents filled with His people, but the focus is on the Encampment, not the individual tents.

- God doesn't say: look – there's a great looking tent from Eddie Bauer, and over there is a cool mountain tent from Alpine Sports.

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There are individual tents, but the 'lovely tents' (plural) descriptive is about the ENCAMPMENT (singular) – the collection of tents with God dwelling in their midst!

In the New Testament, each of us is a 'tent' – the Holy Spirit resides in us – and together – we are the Body of Christ. By the way – this cuts against the notion that *“I don't need to attend church, it can be just me and Jesus.”* While we CAN *ignore* the fact that we are part of the body of Christ, we CANNOT *escape* it

<SLIDE>: the BRIDE

- Bride OF CHRIST: PLURAL OR SINGULAR – SYMBOLIC OR LITERAL –
ARE WE HOLY ENOUGH FOR HIM TO RETURN?

What do I mean “are we holy enough for His return?” I'll get into this in a moment.

The Bible sometimes uses metaphors to express a deep mystery about God. The “Bride of Christ”, the “Body of Christ” and “New Jerusalem” are three such metaphors. Just like the encampment of individual tents is Israel, the church – made up of individual believers – is the Body of Christ – we make up that ONE entity. The emphasis is on unity.

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When the Church is said to be the Bride of Christ, it is a **METAPHOR**; Scripture is using a metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a single word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison. Paul says the relationship between Christ and the Church is like that of a husband to a wife. It helps us to understand more clearly the mysteries of God.

- Luther called this relationship the “marvelous exchange” in which Christ assumes our debts and we inherit His wealth.

There are other metaphors for the Church – the Body of Christ, the New Jerusalem and so on. These all show that our life is as a COMMUNITY of disciples, an Encampment of tents. These metaphors hint at the mystery of Christ's relationship with His church.

Problems with metaphors and other literary devices arise when you either over-spiritualize them or when you take them too literally and miss what it was meant to convey. For example, when Jesus is said that He is the “Door”, or the Lamb of God”, it certainly does not mean He is a literal door or a literal fuzzy lamb. Psalm 91:4 says “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.”

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- God – to the best of my knowledge – is not a cosmic chicken.⁷

These expressions are metaphors, they're symbolic, showing a mystery of God.

I mention this because there is a mistaken teaching going around today about the metaphor '*the Bride of Christ*' – it's called the BRIDAL PARADIGM OR BRIDAL IDENTITY. This teaching emphasizes the Church as the Bride of Christ and the **Kingdom of God as a love affair between Jesus and His Bride**. It asserts that the *Song of Solomon* is a *sensuous* description of Jesus' intimate love affair with us as individuals, not with the nation of Israel or with the Church corporately.

- All previous generations of Christians, as well as the Hebrew sages, are said to have misunderstood the Song of Solomon.

The teaching also holds that *before* Jesus can return, we – the Bride – must spruce ourselves up and learn how to pray properly.⁸ Jesus will not return to the earth until His Bride *really wants Him* to come

⁷ ala Walter Martin

⁸ Mike Bickle audio message #2; given March 6, 2008

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The person spearheading this message claims that God spoke in an audible voice and told him that he was going to change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the whole earth *in one generation*.⁹ He says that he has had several visits to heaven and conversations with the Almighty. In one such visit, God *forced* him to ride in a golden chariot—undoubtedly to keep his humility intact. His chariot was one of about thirty–five in a procession of leaders, apostles, and prophets who would be joining his movement that would someday be worldwide.

<By the way, last time I talked about Rick Joyner and his imaginary visit to heaven – this individual I’m talking about today is not Rick Joyner; he is an individual who probably has an even greater standing in the prophetic community.>

But their teachings DO have some elements in common. Both include an idea that is **COMMON throughout history to almost all false doctrine: and that is – WE LACK KNOWLEDGE:**

(here’s a QUOTE) *“Jesus is not coming until the Body of Christ globally is crying out ‘Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus,’ and they don't just say, ‘Come and forgive me,’ they are crying out in the*

⁹ http://www.mikebickle.org.edgesuite.net/MikeBickleVOD/2009/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf

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***understanding** of who they are as the one that is cherished by Jesus in the bridal identity”¹⁰*

And, of course, the purveyor of the teaching is the one who has been personally commissioned by God to help us understand our identity.

Now, if you do not understand what he means by *‘the bridal identity’*, it’s probably because you have read the Bible literally and have never found anything regarding a special anointing that imparts a revelation of a "bridal identity." So, good for you!

- **Now, think about this for a moment: does it sound kosher to you that Jesus now TOTALLY depends upon US in order for Him to get a permission slip to leave heaven?**

Jewish Wedding Custom: I find it ironic that this teaching about the Bridal Identity is CONTRARY to the historic Jewish wedding customs that Scripture refers to with the metaphor of the bride and the bridegroom. This was the process:

- After the betrothal ceremony, a bridegroom goes away to his father’s house to prepare a room for his bride – **sound familiar?**

¹⁰ Mike Bickle, message recorded March 6, 2008).

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- But before he goes away, he gives his wife a bridal gift – a pledge and reminder of his love for her during their days of separation.
 - Christ gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit as a sign of His love for the church and a reminder of His Promise to return.

In the historic Jewish wedding tradition, the bridegroom can only return for his bride **WHEN HIS FATHER SAYS the room is in proper order**; **it's NOT when the bride buys a new pair of shoes and loses a few pounds. It's totally the FATHER'S decision; it is not her's or the Bridegroom's!**

And regarding the Song of Solomon being about Jesus' love affair with me individually, I'm certainly not going to be literally married to Jesus as an individual – it's a metaphor – it is speaking about a type of *relationship*.

- **And – We are not all INDIVIDUAL brides as it is inferred sometimes. Jesus is not a polygamist.**
- And Jesus is not going to literally kiss me on the mouth as in the Song of Solomon.

*I am saddened by how Christians can so easily be misled by the enthusiasm of leaders. **The fact that many have brought***

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into this teaching just proves the old saying: “YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD TO LEARN SOMETHING STUPID.”

Not only is the teaching wrong, but I believe that it actually DISTORTS the true character of Christ.

- Think about it – When someone essentially says that Jesus *cannot* return because we're not perfect enough yet, they're taking a position *complete opposite* from what a *true loving husband would do in the case where his bride NEEDS his love more than ever*, such as when his bride has a serious illness or a disfiguring accident and cannot help herself.

Help yourself – they say! That's the KEY to many false teachings – that we, by our own efforts, *can make ourselves holy enough* for Jesus. But Scripture says that we are sanctified by Christ – not our own efforts; He Alone can clean us up. Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 5:

<SLIDE> Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of the water by the word, 27 so that he may present the church to himself as glorious—not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless.

Christ is the One Who sanctifies us. Christ is the One Who causes us to be glorious, without wrinkle or blemish or stain.

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Just as a husband protects his wife, Christ protects us.
That's good doctrine!

Is the bridal paradigm BIBLICAL? No, it is not. Only the Father determines when Jesus returns in the fullness of His time. Contrary to the belief of many, everything God does is NOT centered on His passion for us – He DOES love us, but His actions are CENTERED ON HIS OWN GLORY! HAVING A MAN-CENTERED VIEW OF THINGS ALWAYS GETS US INTO TROUBLE.

There is some truth being presented in the movement, but we are the Bride of Christ *corporately, not individually*.

- And – as a side note – I believe it is somewhat presumptuous – **even for someone who rides in a heavenly chariot** – to assert that the primary meaning of the Song of Solomon was missed by all previous generations of Christians until he came along.

Paul tells us in Colossians that we are to guard against these “elite” Christians with new teachings, people who claim secret knowledge from visions and dreams that will enable the rest of us to get the Christian life right.

“See to it (Paul says) that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ... Let no one disqualify you, delighting in self-abasement and worship of angels, taking

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his stand on visions, inflated without reason by his fleshly mind " Colossians 2:8, 18

DOCTRINE

A brief aside – I recognize that I seem to comment upon false teaching in almost every presentation lately. The last time, I discussed Rick Joyner's vision; today, it is the teaching of Mike Bickle – and I know that these individuals are widely respected and admired by some here. I don't question either their sincerity or their love of Christ – it's their doctrine that is at issue.

I want to assure you that it's not as if I go *looking* for issues. The Book of Numbers in particular shines a spotlight on Who God is, Who Christ is, and who we are. And what it says is in *glaring opposition* to some of the teachings in contemporary Spirit-filled Christianity. When I stand here before you, I have a *responsibility* to explain how a Scriptural text applied back then and how it applies today.

Sometimes you might think that there's a real disagreement between Bill and myself over the matter of doctrine. He often talks about the *danger* of doctrine obscuring the truth about Christ. And I often talk about doctrine as being *essential* to the Christian walk and a tool

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by which we can recognize erroneous teaching. But, there's less of a disagreement between us than you might think. What can be confusing is that Bill & I are often referring to different types of doctrine.

I'm talking about essential doctrine, such as the virgin birth of Christ, His divinity, His bodily resurrection, that He is the Only Way to the Father, that salvation is thru His shed blood on the cross, and that justification is by faith alone thru grace and not of works. *Sola scriptura, sola gratia* and *sola fide* -- scripture alone rather than mere church tradition, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.

- These are orthodox principles of historic Christianity – they are the essentials to the faith once delivered to the saints. Being a JW is definitely not orthodox because they deny the essential doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, along with Jesus' bodily resurrection and other associated doctrines.

So, there is essential doctrine that we hold as Christians. What Bill often argues against is devotion to nonessential doctrine – such as whether – in baptism – we should be dunked or sprinkled; whether we need to abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent; whether Bingo is a sacrament and so on. The minor particulars of the various traditions – those associated with being a Catholic or Episcopalian or

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Presbyterian or Methodist or Pentecostal or Independent – are not the essentials of the Gospel. **Christ is the essential heart of the Gospel** and all Christian denominations agree – else they are no longer Christian.

I can remember interrupting Bill during a Sunday service as he was criticizing how an emphasis on doctrine often becomes a detriment to the essential truth of the Gospel. I asked him what he considered the essential truth of the Gospel. He replied – and I'm paraphrasing – that *Jesus is the Son of God, that He alone saves us by faith and we must cling to Him, not to mere church tradition.*

- **I replied – that's good doctrine!**

So, there are essential doctrines and there are nonessential ones. Christians have often divided over matters *not* essential to Christian orthodoxy, so there is now a tendency to downplay any essential differences within the churches. That's good up to a point. But, if Christian unity is to mean anything, it must be a **unity of faith grounded in the truth.** To sacrifice conviction for “peace” is to have no conviction at all. Important concepts matters and protect the church against deception – **I can't think of any martyr who went to the stake being indifferent to essential doctrine.**

Ok – moving on...

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SLIDE: BLESSED AND CURSED

In Verse 9, Balaam says:

‘Blessed are they who bless you and cursed are they who curse you.’

This promise of blessing and cursing is essentially a repeat of what God told Abraham 600+ years earlier. We’ve also saw this statement in Balaam’s 1st Oracle back in Chapter 23.

I point out verse 9 here because it is made thru the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the nation of Israel while camped on the Plains of Moab. I've heard some say that whatever is still valid today after 4,000 years when God made promises to Abraham, those promises only apply now spiritually to Christ and the church as Abraham’s descendants by faith. Therefore, it is wrong to apply the promises God made to Abraham to the Jewish people today.

Well, there are *temporal promises* and there are *spiritual promises*. Certain promises were made Abraham’s offspring by faith. Christ is the blessing to all nations. This cannot be denied. But not all promises were in the same category.

- **For example, WHO OWNS THE LAND OF ISRAEL?** Now, I don’t want to get into a debate today on the land issue itself – **because there is no debate in Scripture – YAHWEH SAYS THAT HE OWNS THE LAND.**

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- And, He states that He can give it to anyone as a possession as He chooses. If they don't follow the rules, then he is free to repossess the land. And, He is free to give it again to them in the future at any time He so chooses.

I believe that verse 9 is helpful here regarding how long a temporal promise from God is valid. We see the SAME promise of blessing and cursing that were made to Abraham, and it's being applied directly to the entire nation of Israel encamped on the Plains of Moab. Abraham has been dead for almost 600 years – and yet, the **very same promise is still in effect**; God has just repeated it for Balak and Balaam to hear. The warning about trying to curse Israel is directed towards gentiles.

This is an often-overlooked text in the whole 'who owns the land' debate. But, here it is...

- Ironic, isn't it: Balaam, a gentile, makes clear that this promise from God to Abraham is still valid long after Abraham and his son Isaac have died and were buried.

I say all this just to offer a note of advice: don't be too quick to discount the *possibility* of the continuation of God's promise of land to the Jewish people simply because it messes up some people's concept of dispensationalism.

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HIDDEN BEHIND THE SCENES

In closing, I want to explore a question that often intrigues me when reading incidents like Balaam's and Balak's activity on the mountain that were totally unknown at the time by Moses and the Israelites.

SLIDE: HOW DID MOSES FIND OUT?

The question is this: how did this material get into the Scripture when it occurred in secret, so to speak.

The attempts to bribe God into cursing the Israelites occurred in the mountains overlooking the Israelite camp. Neither Moses nor any other Israelite were up there with Balaam and Balak. So, how did Moses come to find out about these events so that he subsequently included it in the Bible? Or for that matter, how did Moses find out about the incident of Balaam and his talking donkey?

Well, the simple answer is that we don't know for sure – one possibility is that God revealed it to Moses. But – I don't think that's what happened here. Another possibility is that Balaam himself wrote it down somewhere and the document subsequently has become lost – this may sound strange, but archeologists are fairly sure that they have found some

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written material from Balaam in modern-day Jordan¹¹ – coincidentally where the plains of Moab are located.

To me, it is more likely that someone who was there on the mountain later told the story to Moses or to someone who subsequently told Moses.

<click> Most likely, Moses found out what happened was thru some relative or associate of **his wife's family** who was there.

<click> **Remember:** when Moses first married after his escape from Egypt: “Moses agreed to stay with the man (Jethro – priest of Midian), and he gave his daughter ‘**Zipporah**’ to Moses in marriage.” Exodus 2:21

<click> In Oracle 2, Balaam addresses King Balak as: “Balak son of **'Zippor'** saw all that the Israelites had done to the Amorites... So the Moabites said to the elders of Midian...” 'Zippor' – perhaps a **Family name!** Numbers 22:1-2,4

<click> We know that Zipporah's father was a “priest (or ruler) of **MIDIAN**”¹² & the Midianites are allied with the Moabites in this confrontation with Israel. So, there's a good chance that Moses' wife Zipporah & Balak are distantly related. It is likely that her relatives were up there on the mountain as the

¹¹ <http://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-balaam-son-of-beor-inscription-tell-deir-alla-succoth-1400-750bc.htm>

¹² Exodus 2:16

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sacrifices were being offered, and they would have heard the conversations. But, we don't know for absolute surety.

Actually, this uncertainty about exactly how some events came to be in Scripture is not that unusual. It is very similar to the question of how some of the dialogue detailing the questioning of Jesus by Pilate and later by Caiaphas and Herod got into Scripture. Who was at the scene that related the info to the writers of the Gospels? It could have been Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea (members of the Sanhedrin who were at Jesus' trial) who provide some of the info. Perhaps a Roman guard who later converted to Christianity, perhaps Pilate's wife, or any number of people who were there and later converted, related their portion of the events.

The important thing is that these events are in Scripture by the Holy Spirit's.

- But, WHY are the events recorded at all? They're interesting – even humorous – but why write them down? Because they say something about the character of God!

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SLIDE: THINGS HAPPENING BEHIND THE SCENES

And, I believe this episode which took place without any knowledge of the Israelites has powerful implications for us.¹³ It is that things *also* happen behind the scenes in our lives.

First implication – is that it shows that **God is winning victories while we're going thru our lives totally unaware of what may be happening behind the scenes.** There is a war going on *all the time* against God and his people (Eph. 6). We see plenty of this in our own lives. But, much of it is hidden from our view – and that's probably a good thing. We may later learn about the battles, as Moses did, but oftentimes we will never know simply because the Lord has turned the threat aside and let it be forgotten.

The second implication from this incident: **evil is POWERLESS to prevent God's Will from unfolding.** And even more thrilling, **they will actually be made to serve God's will.**

Proverbs 21:1 says

'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases'.

Balaam was undoubtedly wicked – the New Testament characterizes him as an avaricious hireling, who 'loved the wages of wickedness' (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11). Nevertheless,

¹³ The three points based on a William Kittle commentary

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Balaam was made to serve the Lord's purpose for Israel even though he never intended to do so.

And finally, this incident **points toward Jesus**. Consider Balaam: he pointed toward Jesus in the messianic prophecy of the 4th oracle – Jesus is the *'star' that 'will come out of Jacob' and 'Who will hold the 'sceptre' that 'will rise out of Israel'* (Num 24:17).

And, Balaam reminds us of the necessity of salvation through faith in Christ alone, not by any works we may do.

Think of Balaam – he is a major character in the Book of Numbers; he utters a series of oracles that are foundational to understanding God's Attributes – such as God is not a man, He never lies or changes His mind or breaks promises like we do when convenient. And Balaam makes that prophecy about the star, the coming of the Messiah in Israel. This is so significant that 1400 years later, magi show up in Jerusalem because of this prophecy. There were the first gentiles to visit and submit to Christ.

But, Balaam himself never believed. He reminds us of those who will come to the Lord when their lives are over and say, *'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'* People will present their good works, their good intentions and a whole list of qualities that seem to them to guarantee their

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acceptance by God and a place in heaven. Yet, Jesus will say, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matt. 7:22–23).

Why? Because they never accepted Christ **on His terms**, they never accept Him in the way He specifies. When God puts His grace in our hearts, He allows us to come to Christ in repentance and faith as our only Redeemer. We have to be willing to admit that our best good works are really not 'good' enough. Coming to Christ with nothing but my helplessness and need of a Savior. And He never turns anyone away.

SLIDE: PEEKING THRU THE FENCE

Song of Songs (2:8–9). The verses state that the lover of Israel " ...is ... standing behind our wall, he is looking through the windows, he is peering through the lattice." In other words, God watches over and protects His people even when He is hidden from our view.

El Shaddai. Nothing can thwart God's sovereign purposes. Even when setbacks occur, they are only a part of what the Lord will use to bring about His ultimate ends. El Shaddai cannot be defeated and will save all those who trust in Him. **Do you trust Him– do I trust Him – to overcome what may be**

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insurmountable obstacles for us? Be confident and thankful today that He will certainly accomplish His will.

Where I Belong -by *Building 428*

Sometimes it feels like I'm watching from the outside
Sometimes it feels like I'm breathing but am I alive
I won't keep searching for answers that aren't here to find

All I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong

So when the walls come falling down on me
And when I'm lost in the current of a raging sea
I have this blessed assurance holding me.

All I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong

When the earth shakes I wanna be found in You
When the lights fade I wanna be found in You

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All I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong