

1. This two chapter sections is all about how a non-Jewish man gives four separate speeches about the present and future nation of Israel. My simple job in this lesson is to explain why we should care about what he said. In order to accomplish that goal, let me summarize these two chapters and then I'll give my usual why we should care speech.
2. Let me begin by explaining where we last left off in this book. There was a non-Jewish prophet named Balaam who was hired by a non-Jewish king named Balak to curse the Israelites. Those two people were the main characters of the last chapter in this lesson. The professional prophet was named Balaam. This man honestly referred to God as the "Lord of His life". The bible never says how did he know about God in the first place and how he became a profit. He just "is".
  - a) Historically, this man became famous not only for the predictions in these two chapters, but also for the fact that he helped the king of the Moabites lead the Israelites astray by getting them to follow Moabite gods. That sin aspect is not until the next lesson.
  - b) In this lesson, we mainly have four speeches given by this prophet Balaam. The speeches in effect blessings upon the nation of Israel both for the present and for their future.
  - c) Among the mysteries of these two chapters is the question of how did the Israelites even know about these speeches? According to the story, neither Moses nor any Israelite was even present when this story took place. Assuming that is true, how did Moses even get a copy of these four speeches to record in the bible? Finally, even with the assumption that Moses did get a copy of them, why is it that God used this foreign prophet to bless them?
  - d) Let me also remind us of the "when" from last week. The Israelites are effectively at the end of their wilderness wanderings and are now camped just outside of Israel in an area of land that belonged to a group called the Moabites. Today that area would be Jordan.
    - i) Since I am discussing "when", historically this is estimated to be about 1,400 BC.
    - ii) The Moabite king was named Balak. The Israelites scared this king because they greatly outnumbered his people. Further, in a recent battle, the Israelites defeated another group called the Amorites. Those Amorites also have recently beaten the Moabites. Therefore the Moabites were legitimately scared of these Israelites.
    - iii) Given that fear in the last chapter, the king of the Moabites hires a foreign profit to curse the Israelites. Apparently, Balaam, the profit had an established reputation for successfully cursing people. He is hired by this king to go curse the Israelites.
    - iv) Balaam realizes he can only say what God tells him to say. In these two chapters we will read of Balaam blessing the Israelites at God's request.
  - e) Like I said in the last lesson, if you get Balak and Balaam mixed up, note the last letter in each name. Think of the "k" in Balak as representing the "king". Think of Balaam and the last letter "m" as someone interested in the money. If one can remember those facts alone, these two chapters are going to be a lot easy to read and remember.
  - f) You may also recall in the last lesson how I stated that there are three types of bible text: "straight forward text, poetry and predictions", straight text is the easiest to teach and last lesson was all straight text. Now the bad news: This lesson is mostly in poetry form with some predictions also thrown in the mix. Biblical poetry is a little harder to follow in that sense. Know that Hebrew poetry does not rhyme like English poetry. Hebrew poetry is about one thought connecting to another thought. Think of the famous phrase, "Spare the rod, spoil the child". The point is the first and second thoughts connect. We will see a lot of that connecting line style as we go through the text of these two chapters.
  - g) The final thing to learn is the simple concept that "what God blesses cannot be undone by what we may say or think". If God chooses to bless the Israelites, there is nothing Balaam can say or do to change that. He is aware of that fact and blesses what God has blessed.

3. With that whole speech out of my system, it is time to talk about what it is God wants us to learn from these two chapters.
  - a) First, I would say that this is a good reminder of what prayer is all about: Getting our will in alignment with God's will. We can mistakenly think of God as a genie in a bottle who we can ask to do our will. Since we usually don't know what He wants in any situation, it is ok to ask Him what we want. However, surrender to Him is about accepting that He is in charge and we are not. If it is His will to bless or curse someone or even a large group, we should accept His will as that is a key concept of living the Christian life: accepting His will for our lives and for those around us.
  - b) OK, John, so this prophet named Balaam does bless the Israelites and it is God's will for Balaam to bless the Israelites. What does that blessing entail and why should I care?
    - i) We mistakenly think of blessing as meaning one gets lots of money and stuff in this lifetime. History is full both rich and poor people who are both saved and not saved, so that is not the issue. Even for these Israelites, it is hard to think of them as being blessed as God just sentenced all but two of them to die in the wilderness, while only their children can enter the Promised Land. It doesn't sound like much of a financial blessing to follow God given what they have been through.
    - ii) OK, then, I'll bite. ☺ How are they blessed? First, remember that eternity is a lot longer than this lifetime. Even if one sets aside the salvation issue for the moment, the point is they got picked to trust the true and living God for their lives. Like us, they got the privilege of learning to trust Him with our lives.
    - iii) To teach this concept another way, it is about attitude. Saved people and unsaved people all go through good and bad times. We all have our times when our lives get very difficult and other times when all is going well. To help us get through the difficult times, we can numb our brains with substances, or we can trust in the true and living God to guide us through all of those times. We can complain that God is not working our way on our timing or we can trust in Him to guide us His way on His timing. That is usually when He does His best work when we truly let go of a difficult situation. I've seen it time and time again.
    - iv) To sum all of this up, the Israelites were blessed because they, like us get to trust in the true God who not only wants to guide them, but in their future, God Himself paid the price for all sins. Therefore, since sin in effect is "no longer an issue", we are now free to trust in Him to guide our lives. That is what Balaam's predictions include and explains how those Israelites and us are blessed.
    - v) Therefore, we read this chapter not to learn ancient history, but to understand how God blesses us through our trust in Him. Just as the nation of Israelites is blessed here for that trust so we too can be blessed for our trust.
  - c) Which reminds me, my lesson title is, "How we are blessed by God". With that simple but happy thought stated, let me start the first verse of this two chapter study.
4. Verse 1: Balaam said, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." <sup>2</sup>Balak did as Balaam said, and the two of them offered a bull and a ram on each altar.
  - a) This lesson starts with Balaam and Balak working together. The last lesson ended with these two meeting each other and now it's time to get down to business. Remember that King Balak hired Balaam to curse the Israelites. Therefore, if this prophet Balaam told the king to build seven altars and sacrifice a bull and ram on each one, the king probably said, "Sure, if that is what it takes to curse them, stand here while I get busy."
    - i) Considering that this king is a "king", I suspect he had servants near by who then started gathering sticks and rocks and put together a fire to set up these altars.
    - ii) Know that bulls and rams are the two largest animals that can be domesticated. It was also customary at that time to sacrifice animals to the local gods. I doubt that king Balak thought any of this was unusual in order for Balaam to do his job.

- b) The big question here is was any of this necessary in order to please God? I would argue that the prophet Balaam already believed in and trusted in God. I sort of see this whole ritual as a way for Balaam to show the king that he is serious about seeking God.
  - i) Balaam is teaching king Balak that if one is going to seek God, one has to give it all they've got. One has to make a complete commitment to seek Him. Seven altars were made, as the number seven is associated with a complete commitment to Him. Just as the world was made in seven days and the Israelites had a seven-day week, that number seven was associated with completeness. That is why, seven altars were built and each one was dedicated to God with two animal sacrifices.
  - ii) Why the animals? In that economy, that offering was expensive. It is giving up the two largest animals that can be used for service. It shows our trust in God by giving Him the first of what we have and trust He will provide more.
  - iii) With that ritual done, now it is time for the prophet Balaam to go pray to God.
- 5. Verse 3: Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offering while I go aside. Perhaps the LORD will come to meet with me. Whatever he reveals to me I will tell you." Then he went off to a barren height. <sup>4</sup>God met with him, and Balaam said, "I have prepared seven altars, and on each altar I have offered a bull and a ram." <sup>5</sup>The LORD put a message in Balaam's mouth and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message."
  - a) In Verse 3, the prophet tells the king to stand there besides the offerings. Balaam calls the offerings the king's offerings and not his own. Balaam then goes away a little to go pray. As Balaam prayed, somehow he understood that God was ready to answer his prayer of passing on a message to King Balak. God told Balaam to go back to where the king was and give the king the unknown message (at this point) that God had given to him.
  - b) So why did Balaam have to step aside to pray? Why couldn't he just pray with the king? I believe it was because Balaam had no idea what God wanted the prophet to say or do to the king, so he wanted to seek God by himself for that moment.
  - c) Also notice that Balaam took credit for the altars. In the previous two verses, the prophet asked the king (and I suppose his aids) to build them. I suppose Balaam is not taking the credit for doing the actual work, but just for ordering this job to be done. This is Balaam's way of showing that he is committed to serving God with his life.
  - d) This leads to another question: Did God respond because of the altars, or just because He wanted to give this upcoming message in the next several verses to Balaam? The idea of a sacrifice is simply a way of showing our serious about our commitment to Him. The bible is real clear on the concept that obedience is better than sacrifice. (See 1st Samuel 15:12.) However, a sacrifice is a step in the right direction to show that we are seeking Him.
  - e) Meanwhile, it is time for Balaam to give his first of four speeches in these two chapters.
- 6. Verse 6: So he went back to him and found him standing beside his offering, with all the princes of Moab. <sup>7</sup>Then Balaam uttered his oracle:
  - a) OK I lied. The actual speech begins in the next part of Verse 7. These sentences are about Balaam standing next to the offerings along with the king and apparently some princes.
  - b) I believe the point of Balaam going back to where the king was standing was so that the king and the princes could hear the speech. In other words, the message that God gave to Balaam wasn't just for his own ears, but for the king to hear as well. Remember that this king hired Balaam to curse the Israelites. This prayer and these four speeches are in effect God's response to that request to curse the Israelites.
  - c) One more thing before I start the speeches themselves. I am curious as to how Moses and the Israelites found out the specifics about these speeches. I suspect is that while Balaam was speaking, someone else was taking notes. It is as if one of the princes could write in shorthand and write down this speech quickly. Can I prove that? Of course not. Still, these words were recorded for us to study and somehow Moses got a hold of them. That is why I think someone wrote them down here. Ok, time for the first speech.

7. Verse 7 (cont.): "Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. 'Come,' he said, curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.' <sup>8</sup>How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced? <sup>9</sup>From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them. I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of 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 righteous, and may my end be like theirs!"
- a) These three-plus verses are Balaam's first prophecy. In most bibles they are written out in "poetry format" with breaks after each half a line. In the original text, they are all part of one paragraph, so they can be properly listed either way.
  - b) As I mentioned in the introduction, one can notice the "Hebrew Poetry" style in English.
    - i) For example in the first half of Verse 8, Balaam asks, "How can I curse what God has not cursed"? In the second half Balaam asks, "How can I denounce what God has not denounced". The point is the idea of poetry is that the first and the second thoughts are connected. Now that you know that, we can discuss what Balaam is actually saying here in these verses.
  - c) The main point to get here is the idea that Balaam cannot curse what God has blessed.
    - i) The idea is we cannot undo what God has done. I heard on the news yesterday about a mosque in Egypt where the leader laid down a big curse on the Israelites. The way I see it is that one can curse the Israelites all one wants. If God wants to bless them, then any and all efforts one makes to curse them is a waste of time.
    - ii) If that is true, how does one explain the Holocaust, let alone every other effort made to kill Jewish people just because they are Jewish? The short answer is that all of those horrible events do not prevent the Israelites from being God's chosen people. He still primarily worked through the Israelites to bring His message (that is the bible) to the world. They are still blessed by Him in that God has a future destiny for that nation. As I like to say, God never said to Abraham, "I will give this land to your descendants, unless of course, they reject the Messiah, and then they will be toast". Instead, the book of Genesis says that God gave Abraham an unconditional promise that the land of Israel will be theirs, period.
  - d) Meanwhile, back to the prophecy. Balaam points out that Israel does not live like other nations in Verse 9. That simply means that they as a nation worship the true and living God and not a bunch of statues and "little gods". Think of ancient history this way: After Noah, the early world still believed in a single god. Eventually that got corrupted so that a multiple god system rose up. I once studied the history of ancient Egypt. At one time they believed in a single god. Their corporate beliefs eventually changed to a system of worshipping multitudes of gods. That type of corruption spread throughout that area. In a sense, God separated the Israelites from that system and that is the point here.
    - i) The point for us is just as the Israelites were separated as a people to worship God, so you and I who trust in Jesus have been separated from the world to serve Him.
  - e) Verse 10 then says in effect, "I can only see one fourth of them". If you recall from earlier in the book of Numbers, the Israelites camped in "fourths". That means four of the twelve tribes camped to the east of the tabernacle, four to the west, four more to the north and the final four to the south. With two million Israelites camped out there, from wherever the prophet Balaam was standing, he could only see one fourth of the large campground.
  - f) The final thing that Balaam says is in effect, "I want to be like them". I truly believe that the prophet Balaam desired to be like the Jewish people in the sense that He believed the God of the Jewish people was the true God who controlled the world. To put it another way, Balaam is saying, "I understand how God has blessed them and I wish I could be a part of that blessing." In our vocabulary it is the reminder that from God's all knowing perspective, He knows who choose to be saved and we are saved because He picked us.

8. Verse 11: Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you have done nothing but bless them!"
  - a) Meanwhile, back to the reality of King Balak wanting Balaam to curse the Israelites, the king is pretty angry right here because Balaam has blessed them instead of cursing them.
  - b) Think of the king this way. He has already paid the expense of sending messengers twice all the way to where Balaam lived (estimated to be 400 miles away) to retrieve him. That was from the last chapter. The king has already sacrificed bulls and rams in order to help this prophet do his job. Now, the prophet Balaam blesses the Israelites instead of doing what he was hired to do, which was curse them.
  - c) We will read in a few verses, that the king doesn't give up so easily. The king at this point was thinking, "I paid all this money. I got this guy all the way out here. I know that he has in the past successfully cursed groups that remained cursed. Also, the Israelites far outnumber my own people. Because I don't want to die and I'm all out of other options, let me figure out some way that I can get this guy to actually curse the Israelites."
  - d) Before we start "Round 2" of the blessing, the prophet Balaam gives a response to why he actually blessed the Israelites in the last few verses.
9. Verse 12: He answered, "Must I not speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?"
  - a) My very loose translation: "I like your money, but I can't violate my power source."
  - b) Again, the king can't give up that easily because he is out of other options. Therefore, the king says in effect, "let's try this again somewhere else and see what happens".
10. Verse 13: Then Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place where you can see them; you will see only a part but not all of them. And from there, curse them for me." <sup>14</sup> So he took him to the field of Zophim on the top of Pisgah, and there he built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. <sup>15</sup> Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offering while I meet with him over there." <sup>16</sup> The LORD met with Balaam and put a message in his mouth and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message."
  - a) At this point, Balak, Balaam, and presumably all the princes traveled to another vantage point where they could all look down at all of the Israelites. Without getting into a lot of geographical details, the Israelites are camped on a large plain east of the Jordan River. There are hills on the north end that overlook that area. The king, prophet and the rest of them traveled to a plain area on one of those hills. Think of it as a look out point.
  - b) I think this traveling party was prepared. Let's face it, if seven more altars were built at this second place, along with bulls and rams sacrificed at each altar, this took preparation and planning. Visualize a caravan walking up these hills carrying supplies and pulling animals along with them, and one gets the general idea.
  - c) Notice the king had the altars built here without the prophet asking him to do so. It is as if the king is saying, "I'm so desperate for you to curse those people, let me offer up these animals on your behalf so you can go do your thing."
  - d) At that point, the prophet Balaam separated himself to go pray and told the king to stand next to his offerings while Balaam goes to talk to God. So why did Balaam again have to separate himself to pray? I think practically, it may have been to get away from the noise of the crowd and maybe even the animals. It may have been his way of saying I want to hear from God and not all of you. Give me a few minutes alone.
  - e) I personally hold the view that if God wanted to give us a message, He would find a way to give it to us. We don't have to be quiet to receive it. In Balaam's mind, he needed to get away from the noise of the crowd in order to hear God. Somehow and in some way God got another message to Balaam and we are now ready, for the second message.
11. Verse 17: So he went to him and found him standing beside his offering, with the princes of Moab. Balak asked him, "What did the LORD say?"
  - a) Here we get another one verse introduction before the second speech actually takes place. The king was curious as to what God said. Verses 18-24 are Balaam's response.

12. Verse 18: Then he uttered his oracle: "Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. <sup>19</sup> God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? <sup>20</sup> I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.
- a) The first three verses of this second speech are specifically for the king. God is saying to this king through Balaam, "I know who you are, and where you come from. I know your family and your father's name was Zippor. Then God says in effect, "Since I know about you (King Balak), let me tell you (king) a little about Me (God)."
  - b) To explain further, let me share one of my favorite thoughts about God. There are three things that God cannot do: The first is God cannot lie. If God was even capable of telling a lie, we cannot trust Him. The second is that God cannot learn. If God was even capable of learning, we cannot trust Him. The third is God cannot force us to love Him. If God could force that, then we are not willfully choosing to be obedient to Him with our lives.
    - i) With that fact stated, notice that Verse 19 in poetic form makes that point. When the text says "a man or a son of man" it means that God is not a created thing like humans are. It is stating the fact that God is above creation.
    - ii) God wants the king to understand here that God is not just a local deity that has to deal with other god deities. The false gods of the local residents did believe that the gods could lie if it served their purpose. God wants to put to bed the idea that he was even capable of telling a lie, let alone actually telling one.
  - c) Meanwhile, I forgot the fact that Balaam is doing the talking and not God Himself. The point is God made a promise to bless the Israelites and He intends to keep that promise because He is not capable of lying in the first place. That is the point here.
    - i) To say it another way, King Balak could build thousands of altars and take Balaam to thousands of look out points, and that could not change the situation.
  - d) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. How does it affect me? Part of the idea is that God cannot be influenced by magic spells. Part of the idea is to remember that if He wants to bless our lives, we can't stop Him. However, we cannot receive that blessing by ignoring His will. Remember that "blessing" is a separate topic from our eternal salvation based on trust in His complete payment for our sins. Finally, like these Israelites, there may be spiritual things happening that they we not be aware of at the moment. The point is God is working for us even when we are not aware of how and where He is working.
  - e) Meanwhile, the prophet Balaam is still in the middle of the second of his four speeches:
13. Verse 21: "No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them. <sup>22</sup> God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of a wild ox. <sup>23</sup> There is no sorcery against Jacob, no divination against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'See what God has done!' <sup>24</sup> The people rise like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion that does not rest till he devours his prey and drinks the blood of his victims."
- a) Let me just say that if you can make it through the poetry and prophesy of this section of the bible, you can learn the meaning of any part of the bible. The secret is to digest these thoughts in bite size pieces and we'll attempt to do that right now.
  - b) Let's start with the first sentence in Verse 21. It says in a poetic way that God does not see any problems with the nation of Israel. For those who don't know, Jacob is the name of the common ancestor of all the Israelites and God renamed Jacob "Israel". It is a poetic way of saying his name twice.
    - i) The interesting question is how can God say that He does not see any problems with this nation? Isn't this the same group that murmured their way through the wilderness the last forty years? Isn't this the same group that didn't trust in Him to lead them to the Promise Land? Yet Verse 21 God clearly says, "I don't see any problems with this group of people." That requires an explanation.

- ii) The explanation is that God sees them as eternally saved because of their trust in Him to guide their lives. Just as He sees us in our eternal and future sinless state based on Jesus' complete payment for all of our sins, so the Israelites could be "sin free" based on their trust in His forgiveness of their sins.
  - c) This leads to the second sentence of Verse 21. It says in effect God is with them and a king is among them. The second phrase is a poetic way of saying "God is their king" and even though they don't literally have a human king, God is that king. Could that also be a poetic reference to the future king (a title for Jesus) that will rule over all the Israelites? Possibly, and I'll talk more about that in the third and fourth speeches by Balaam.
  - d) In Verse 22 it states the fact that God brought them out of Egypt and as a whole group, they have the strength of a wild ox. That term "wild ox" is translated "unicorn horn" in the King James Version. The idea of the original term is a single horn sticking out of an animal that represents the strength of that animal. Whatever animal the author did have in mind, when that analogy was made, the point is that the nation of Israel is strong only as long as they are trusting in Him to guide their lives.
    - i) The lesson for us here is about the strength that you and I have as believers when we are trusting in His power in order to accomplish His will for our lives.
  - e) Verse 23 is essentially a reminder that God cannot be influenced by sorcery. While I am convinced God allows demonic forces to have some power that we cannot understand, I also understand that His power is greater than such demonic powers. Why does He grant such power to such dark forces? Simple. To remind us to trust in Him and not our own strength in order to overcome the "dark forces" (for a lack of a better term) that exist.
    - i) This verse reminds us that such powers are no match for God Himself.
  - f) Finally Verse 24 says in effect that the combined power of the Israelites is like a hungry lion that eats and devours its prey. The point being that if someone is doing God's will, there is no force that can stop them or us from accomplishing that will.
  - g) OK John, this is all interesting if someone knows what is God's will for their lives. I have no idea what will happen to me today or in the future. How do I discern His will? Great question. The short answer is the obvious one of regular prayer and time in His word. His will is to just go forward in life, make the best decisions possible and trust in the fact that He is guiding us as we go just as He was guiding the Israelites.
    - i) My point is if we accept that concept, we can be blessed like the Israelites are here.
  - h) Meanwhile, we got through poetic prophecy without too much trouble. Again, if one can handle that last section of scripture, one can handle the rest of this lesson and be able to understand with a little study any section of the bible. Meanwhile number two, ☺ King Balak didn't like this prophecy and says so in the next verse.
14. Verse 25: Then Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them at all nor bless them at all!" <sup>26</sup> Balaam answered, "Did I not tell you I must do whatever the LORD says?"
- a) While King Balak may not have understood every implication of this speech, that king did understand it enough to realize Balaam was blessing Israel and not cursing them. That is why the king essentially said, "It would have been better for you to just keep your mouth shut than to state what you have said in these last two speeches."
  - b) The prophet Balaam's response was in effect, "I don't care what you pay me, my job is to state what God tells me to state and I can't violate His will for my life." The interesting thing is we will read in the next lesson how Balaam does help the king think up a plot in order to turn the Israelites away from God. It is as if Balaam is thinking, "I can't earn my money by disobeying God's words, but on my own power I can still earn my fee when I do turn away from Him." However, that is the next chapter. In this lesson, Balaam is on a roll, preaching what God told him to preach. Therefore, I'm going to give Balaam credit here for doing God's will and giving these four little speeches that do accurately predict things about the nation of Israel's present and future purpose and role in history.

15. Verse 27: Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come, let me take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God to let you curse them for me from there." <sup>28</sup> And Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, overlooking the wasteland. <sup>29</sup> Balaam said, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." <sup>30</sup> Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.
  - a) Meanwhile, King Balak is not willing to give up so easily. After all, he has already had his servants sacrifice fourteen bulls and fourteen rams and build fourteen fires. That does not include the travel with this group and with those animals to two high points in that area.
  - b) Remember that King Balak is all out of other options. He is convinced he cannot defeat the Israelites in battle and he thinks his only hope is to have an established prophet curse this group. He is still thinking that if he can get the prophet Balaam to the right place or in the right circumstances he will take the king's money and curse the Israelites.
    - i) Think of the king's efforts in terms of our "old human nature" not wanting to let go of any control of our lives and letting God take over. That is the idea here.
  - c) In the meantime, these verses say that we have 14 more animals being offered here as the prophet Balaam is getting ready for predictions number three.
16. Chapter 24: Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorcery as at other times, but turned his face toward the desert. <sup>2</sup> When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him <sup>3</sup> and he uttered his oracle:
  - a) A small mystery here is what does the text mean by "Balaam did not resort to sorcery as at other times"? Did he have some ritual that he performed before the first two speeches? Whatever Balaam did, he did not apparently go through his usual sorcery rituals, whatever they were, and just sought God directly.
    - i) What is the point for us? As we mature as believers, we learn how God is more than willing to meet us "where we are" in life. God is not angry at us because of sins we have committed. Yes, there is sin confession, but that is to make us aware of things He wants us to change in order to draw closer to Him.
    - ii) I have met too many people who wrongly think that if they step into a church, the walls will fall down because they are there. God wants a relationship with us and that starts with meeting us just where we are in life.
    - iii) Coming back to Balaam, he is learning that God wants him to complete what He has called him to do (bless Israel) and no ritual is needed to do that assignment.
  - b) One also gets the impression from these verses that wherever Balaam was standing he was now at a high enough look out point where he could see all of Israel camping out.
    - i) The point here is Balaam is now focused on what God wants him to focus upon, the nation of Israel. Once he saw them, God was ready to give him "Message #3".
    - ii) Speaking of that message, let us begin that text.
17. Verse 4: "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, <sup>4</sup> the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened: <sup>5</sup> "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! <sup>6</sup> "Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters. <sup>7</sup> Water will flow from their buckets; their seed will have abundant water.
  - a) This speech starts with some self-realization. Balaam refers to himself by his "full name" and realizes that God has opened his eyes. That means God has given Balaam an ability to predict the future with great accuracy.
  - b) Time to talk quickly about the gift of prophecy itself. I do believe God gives some people a special ability to know about future events. I have a friend who has that gift. It does not mean one can use it at will say, to make money. At times He just chooses to reveal things to people that somehow ultimately can use that information for His glory. This gift does not have an "on and off switch" that we can control when we want to use it.

- c) I know that at times, I have had some strange visions. When they happen, I don't go out of my way to make them or prevent them from happening. I just wait to see if happens. Of all the spiritual gifts one could have, prophecy seems exciting but it is not something I seek. I just figure that if God wants to give me a message about the future, He can and He will just because He can and I don't worry about what I cannot control.
  - d) OK, enough of that. What is this prophecy that Balaam had? In effect it was about the future of the nation of Israel. Think of it this way: As Balaam saw the literal tents of the Israelites spread out, did they physically look any different than any other large group of tents? I doubt it. It is just Balaam realizing that God is blessing the Israelites about their future as a nation.
    - i) If you have read my first lesson on Numbers, you will remember that from the sky the layout of these twelve tribes formed a big cross. It was four tribes in each of the four directions from the tabernacle. I think Balaam noticed that as he looked down on the Israelites from his high vantage point.
  - e) Think about it this way: How many Moabites, Amorites and Canaanites exist today? None. Yet the Israelites still exist today. The fact that they have survived as a nation for those thousands of years alone shows how God has preserved them. Somehow Balaam got the idea that this was God's chosen people and in that sense "their tents were blessed".
  - f) Next we get images of "flowing water". Remember that this whole area is a desert where water is scarce. To have "buckets of water flowing" is a reference to the fact that Balaam sees the Israelites as being blessed by God. The land of Israel has good sources of water and modern Israel has industrial plants that convert seawater into fresh water, over and above such natural water sources as the Jordan River. The point is Israel as a nation will flourish and having water to live is not a problem. Also consider how God has provided water for them just to get them this far, let alone in the land of Israel.
    - i) OK, so what? So God has blessed them to grow and prosper, how does any of that affect my life? Consider that Genesis 12:3 says, "I will bless those that bless you (Israel) and curse those that curse you." The point is God can bless us by blessing that nation. Does that mean we have to write them a check or something? That misses the point. Praying for the prosperity and the survival of that nation is a good place to start. God is blessing those who do support His people.
    - ii) Does that mean one is saved if one is Jewish? No, salvation is not the issue here. This is about God choosing to bless whom He chooses to bless. If we accept the idea that He is blessing the nation of Israel, we should join in what He chooses to bless and we will be blessed. If we are saved through Jesus, how are we blessed by blessing Israel? For starters, think how the United States has prospered due to our trust and support of that nation. Think of it as wanting His will for our lives. If it is His will to bless them, then for that reason alone we should bless them.
  - g) Meanwhile, back to Balaam, his point with the water references is mainly that this nation will not only survive as a nation, but prosper because of their trust in Him. That's it.
18. Verse 7 (con't): "Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted.
- a) Many hundreds of years later, there is a story in 1st Samuel 15 about an Amalakite king named Agag who King Saul failed to kill and the prophet Samuel himself had to kill him.
    - i) If Balaam is giving a long-term future prediction, this is looking toward the time about 400 years later when Israel was coming to its peak of its power back then.
  - b) A natural question comes here. How would Balaam even know about "Agag" and make that reference if it is hundreds of years into the future? For starters, know that Agag was the king of a group called the "Amalekites". These were the Israelites sworn enemy and the first nation that ever attacked them. (See Exodus 17:8). Going forward to the days of King Saul, the king of this group was named Agag. I wonder if there was another king "Agag" (maybe a title) of the same group that existed at the time of Balaam.

- c) My point is for this prophecy to be a "prophecy" people of the time of Moses and the time of Balaam (same time) had to understand its meaning. That is why I suspect there was another well-known and probably powerful king named Agag that existed back then.
    - i) There is an old expression about biblical prophecy that one needs to learn. Often such prophecy has a "double fulfillment". In this case, there may have been a local king named Agag that Balaam was comparing to the Israelites.
    - ii) The "short term" fulfillment of this prediction is about how the nation of Israel did enter the Promised Land and did survive attacks of the Amalekites.
    - iii) The "long term" fulfillment is the prediction of another king named Agag who did harass the Israelites and the prophet Samuel had to kill as Saul failed to do so.
  - d) OK why should we care? The point is when we study bible prophecy, both Judaism and Christianity teach that prophecy is patterns for us to study. Therefore, when one reads of an ancient prediction, watch for patterns that could be repeated later in history or in our own lives. OK, enough of all of this, time to move on.
19. Verse 8: "God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of a wild ox. They devour hostile nations and break their bones in pieces; with their arrows they pierce them. <sup>9</sup>Like a lion they crouch and lie down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse them? "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!"
- a) My loose translation: "Do you need proof that God has blessed them? They managed to defeat the most powerful known army of that time era, the Egyptians and got out of there alive. They have survived in a truly inhospitable environment, the wilderness for the last forty years." I picture Balaam saying, "King Balak, you want me to curse them? How can I curse what God has obviously blessed tremendously and will bless them in the future."
    - i) Instead of being that literal, Balaam talks in "animal analogies". Why? To give a strong visual picture that people can remember. We remember visual pictures much better than literal description and thus this story here.
  - b) Then in Verse 9 Balaam quotes Genesis 12:3 as if he had somehow read that verse. I don't think Balaam knew that bible verse, he is just stating what God told him to say and what is becoming obvious to him that God is blessing this nation. The point is that King Balak could not truly curse them even if he wanted to and Balaam is stating that here.
  - c) Thus ends the third speech. Number four is coming up in five verses. In the meantime, we come back to King Balak and his anger over the fact Balaam did not curse the Israelites.
20. Verse 10: Then 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. <sup>11</sup>Now leave at once and go home! I said I would reward you handsomely, but the LORD has kept you from being rewarded."
- a) John's very very loose translation: Hey Balaam, I'm going to call the bank and put a stop payment on the check I just gave you. I hired you to curse the Israelites and so far you have made three speeches to bless them. Don't even ask for a payment.
  - b) We will discover in the next lesson how Balaam did give into the temptation of wanting to earn money that God didn't want him to earn, but I'm getting ahead of myself. For now, let us read of Balaam's response to the "your check has been cancelled" statement.
21. Verse 12: Balaam answered Balak, "Did I not tell the messengers you sent me, <sup>13</sup>'Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything of my own accord, good or bad, to go beyond the command of the LORD—and I must say only what the LORD says'? <sup>14</sup>Now I am going back to my people, but come, let me warn you of what this people will do to your people in days to come."
- a) John's more loose translation: "Keep your money. I serve God and I can only say and do what He instructs me to do. (A great lesson for us to learn). Now, I am going home. First, let me warn you of what the Israelites will do to your nation (the Moabites) in the distant future." With that statement, Balaam is about to start speech number four.

22. Verse 15: Then he uttered his oracle: "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, <sup>16</sup> the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened:
- a) Balaam starts this speech by stating "I have been given the privilege of not only having a relationship with the God of this world, but also given the privilege of being able to see into the distant future through prophecy." With his awareness of that ability, he literally "falls before God who has opened my eyes to see things that will happen in the future."
    - i) I am aware that I should have called this lesson "John's very loose translation", but then I thought it is better to stick with "How we are blessed by God" as that is what He wants us to focus on in this lesson.
  - b) One of my favorite bible verses on the topic of prophecy is "For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus." (Revelation 19:10 NIV).
    - i) More "loose translation": The purpose of prophecy is not to just state facts that will happen in the future, but to get people to focus upon Jesus. Think of it this way, if people realize that someone has a gift for prophesy, they should not look to that person as being blessed, but it should get us to focus on the fact that the bible is the word of God and He has the power to give such a gift to people.
    - ii) Another reason I quote Revelation here, is that this fourth prophecy by Balaam does literally point to the future Messiah (a Jewish word that is "Christ" in Greek) that we Christians use to point to Jesus. My point is this fourth speech is going to focus on the key point of all of history, Jesus coming into the world to pay the price for sin and the fact He will come again to rule over this world.
    - iii) With that thought in mind, it is time to get back to Balaam's speech.
23. Verse 17: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel."
- a) The first point is that this Messiah is not coming now, in Balaam's time, but Balaam was being made aware of the fact that Jesus will (future tense to him, past tense to us) one day.
  - b) Consider the prediction that a "star will come out of Jacob". Remember the wise men who brought gifts to baby Jesus? They were waiting for a certain star to appear. I believe that those "wise men" did study parts of the Old Testament and associated the "star references" with following that star to lead them to Jesus. Those "wise men" came from the same area as where Balaam lived.
  - c) While we are discussing images, let me also discuss a "scepter". Think of that as a "ruling stick". Many ancient kings held a stick as a symbol of their power. The point is coming from the Israelites will be a powerful ruler, who will rule over the world one day.
    - i) OK Jesus didn't do that, and that is one reason why Jews reject Jesus. Christians do teach that Jesus will return one day to rule over the world, and in effect, that is the prediction being made by Balaam in this verse.
24. Verse 17 (cont.); He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. <sup>18</sup> Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong.
- a) From these verses to the end of the chapter (Verse 24), Balaam changes his focus from the coming of the Messiah to what will happen to the nations that surround Israel. Since I am specializing in loose translation today, it is time for one more: Hey King Balak, all these nations that are around here (including yours, the Moabites) will be destroyed one day, but the nation of Israel will live on and survive long past all of them.
  - b) Time for one more "short term and long term" predictions: First the Israelites did make it into the Promised Land. By the time King David arose to power hundreds of years later, he did conquer over all of the nations mentioned in these verses and the one's coming up. Some of these nations did survive after the time of King David. When Jesus comes back to rule forever, there will be a complete conquering of the nations that threaten Israel.

- c) As one reads all of these final verses about ancient nations, I believe the secret is to not get too bogged down in which nation is which. Just remember that when Jesus returns, part of His mission is to rule the world forever from Israel. That is one reason why the nation of Israel must exist at the time of Jesus' return. I also believe that is a reason why demonic forces are working so hard to destroy the existence of Israel as a modern nation.
  - d) With that bit of prophesy out of my system, it is time to finish the chapter.
25. Verse 19: A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city."
- a) Speaking of Jesus, I present Verse 19. The "short term" fulfillment of this verse is that the Israelites did defeat many of the Moabites after the "incident" of the next chapter. A long term fulfillment is when King David, roughly 500 years later conquers this area.
  - b) As I stated, prophecy is to be read in "patterns". The final fulfillment of this prophecy is when Jesus comes back to rule the world from Israel.
26. Verse 20: Then Balaam saw Amalek and uttered his oracle: "Amalek was first among the nations, but he will come to ruin at last."
- a) If you recall from a few pages back, I discussed a prediction about a future king named "Agag" that was defeated by King Saul. That king was the king over the "Amalekites".
  - b) When the text says this was the "first of the nations", I don't believe it means they were the first group ever to form a nation. It means they were the first to attack and Israel. That nation was alive and well at the time of Balak and Balaam. The point is that powerful nation will also come to ruin one day. Need proof? How many Amalekites exist today.
27. Verse 21: Then he saw the Kenites and uttered his oracle: "Your dwelling place is secure, your nest is set in a rock; <sup>22</sup>yet you Kenites will be destroyed when Asshur takes you captive." <sup>23</sup>Then he uttered his oracle: "Ah, who can live when God does this? <sup>24</sup> Ships will come from the shores of Kittim; they will subdue Asshur and Eber, but they too will come to ruin."
- a) The chapter ends with some predictions about some other nations that I doubt most of you have ever heard of. I could give you some interesting history how each of these nations were literally destroyed many centuries later exactly as the bible predicted.
  - b) What is a more valuable use of our time is simply to know that "the bible is true and it's predictions are 100% accurate". So how do we know that they were written at this time and not say, a thousand years later? Well, for starters Jesus Himself says that Moses wrote this book. My view is "If you don't believe Jesus' words, you have a much bigger problem than who wrote Numbers." Over and above that, there is lots of internal evidence based on the words used that when Numbers was written, the author had fairly extensive knowledge of the people and customs of that time era.
  - c) Meanwhile, let me give you the "30 second version" of these verses if interested.
    - i) The Kenites were another neighboring tribe. They were destroyed by the Assyrian Empire that arose centuries later. Verse 24 may refer to the rise of the Philistines that first settled in that area centuries later and conquered the groups referred to here as Asshur and Eber. Even if I've got my facts wrong here, the point is none of these groups exist today and that alone is proof that these predictions came true.
28. Congratulations, you have just survived two chapters of predictions and poetry. If you made it through this lesson, you can handle the rest of the book. Probably the thing you will remember most about this lesson is "John's very loose translations" and the fact that God blesses who He chooses to bless and there is nothing we can do to change that. Therefore, if we desire to have blessings in our life, yes it comes from obedience to Him, His word and His desires for our lives, but it also comes from blessing those who God has blessed as I have stressed in this chapter.
29. With that said, let me give a quick closing prayer: Father, may we bless what You have blessed, and accept Your will for our lives and for the world we live in. We desire to have a blessed life, and we know that trust in You gives us far greater joy than trying to live without Your guidance. Help us to live to make that difference for You and trust that You do desire to bless our lives now, based on that trust in You. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.