

Balaam- Hired of Balak and Used of God

by John Nelson Darby

The story of Balaam and Balak illustrates how Satan's opposition brings out God's people in their own place of blessing, and the importance of distinguishing between God's judgment and the Spirit's judgment.

Scripture: Numbers 22:38, Numbers 23:7

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "Justification in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby explores the narrative of Balaam and Balak, emphasizing how God's sovereignty turns the wicked intentions of Balaam into a means of blessing for Israel. Despite Balaam's wickedness and attempts to curse God's people, he ultimately can only speak the blessings that God puts in his mouth, showcasing the confusion between human will and divine purpose. The sermon highlights the distinction between God's judgment of His people and their moral failures, affirming that believers are justified through Christ, regardless of their shortcomings. Darby encourages the congregation to recognize their identity as God's peculiar people, blessed and protected under His care, and to find peace in their standing before Him. The overarching message is that God's power prevails over the schemes of evil, revealing the beauty and strength of His people.

Transcript

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NUMBERS 22-24

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We find in these chapters the connection of the name of God with the power of Satan. Some of the instruments which he uses may be, and some of them may not be, conscious that it is Satan's power which actuates them. Nothing could be greater confusion than that which here passes between Balaam and Balak.

Balaam, we know, was a thoroughly wicked man. (See Rev. 2 : 14 ; 2 Peter 2 : 15, 16 ; Jude 11.) Nothing could exceed the wickedness and perverseness of his ways. And yet he is called a prophet; as it is said, "Who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet." We know that he was acquainted with and used

enchancements (chap. 24 : i) ; and yet, when he comes to Balak, he says, " Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything ? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak," chap. 22 : 38. Balak was looking for the power of evil against the children of Israel, God's people; and yet looking for it from God; chap. 23 : 27. There was a sort of looking to the power and intervention of God, although God was not known ; and thus all was confusion.

And so in the world ; even where Satan is working, and where in those who are intelligent in evil he is looked to as working, there is often a certain vague looking to God. Thus there is complete confusion-man's will being Satan's will, and yet with a certain owning of God.

Chapter 22 : 1--6. We see the enmity of the world against the people of God brought out, and especially against the power of the people of God. God's power was with His people, and this drew out the enmity of Satan. When the Son of God came into the world, the whole energy of Satan's power and enmity was directed against Him ; so afterwards against the apostles, those who had " turned the world upside down," Acts 17 : 6. But God's power was with and for His people. See the song of Moses ; Ex. 15 : 4-16. God had redeemed His people with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm from the power and bondage of Satan, and had brought them to Himself; Ex. 19 : 4. When this is the case, Satan seeks to force others into an open opposition to the people of God. Their presence becomes intolerable to their enemies. But the effect of it all is, to bring out God's people as being under His eye and care. The very wish that God should curse Israel ply brought out the more His distinct blessing upon them. "And he [Balaam] took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed ? or how shall I defy, whom Jehovah hath not defied ? For from the tops of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations," chap. 23 : 7-9. Here we find the effect of Satan's opposition was to bring out into the clearest manifestation that they were not of the world.

So long as Israel were living in Egypt, there was nothing at all that drew out the thoughts and feelings of Balak and Balaam against them, or that made them intolerable to the world ; but the chief point of the testimony to their blessing is that they were a peculiar people, separated from all other people unto God, according to that word, " Jehovah hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people," Deut. 26: 18.

Verse 11 and onward: Balaam, at the suggestion of Balak, seeks to curse Israel from " another place." He tells Balak, " Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I go and meet - yonder." He does not seem to know whom he was going to meet. It is all the most thorough and perfect confusion. He says, " While I go and meet - yonder." But there Jehovah meets him, and puts a word in his mouth proving the firmness of God's purpose concerning His people. " God is not a man, that he should lie ; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ? Behold, I have received commandment to bless." Balaam would gladly have altered this testimony of God; but he says, " He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it."

Then comes the testimony to the completeness of God's justification of His people: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel.,, This is not a mere abstract statement of truth. Israel had acted so failingly and unbelievably during their wilderness journey, as to bring out from Moses, the meekest man upon the face of the earth, the expression, " Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you," Deut. 9 : 24. The result of the judgment of the man of God about them after forty years' experience was, that they were a stiff-necked and rebellious people ; but the

judgment of God in reference to their justification was altogether opposite to his judgment of the moral condition of the people.

It is most important in applying this to ourselves to draw the distinction clearly between these two things ; the judgment of the Spirit of God within me as to what we are practically, as to the evil of the flesh, etc., and the testimony of the Spirit as to what God's judgment is in reference to us in Christ. We often find the soul forming through the Spirit of God a righteous judgment about itself, and forgetting that the ground on which it stands before God, the resting-place of faith, is what He has wrought for us in the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of God judges sin in me by virtue of its character as seen in the light of the holiness of God, but it makes me know that I am not judged for it, because Christ has borne the judgment for me. It is no question of examining the details of either good or evil that we find in ourselves ; it is altogether a question of the efficacy and value of Christ's work, and of His acceptance. We either stand under the broad condemnation of God, sinners dead in trespasses and sins, or are " accepted in the beloved." Although it is most important that we should judge ourselves, as it is said, " If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged," etc. (i Cor. 11 : 31, 32) ; yet this is quite a distinct thing from the judgment which God forms about us through the work of Christ. At the end of a long course of failure in the children of Israel, after their perverseness has been fully proved, God " hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." Where the soul of a believer confounds the judgment of the Spirit within and about himself with the judgment of God through the work of Christ for him, there can be no peace.

" Jehovah his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." The distinguishing mark of the people of God is, that He is in them and among them. (See i Cor. 14 : 25.) The utter feebleness of the saints is shewn wherever this is not the case. It is a blessed truth, that God has for ever saved and justified His children ; but this is in order that He may " dwell among them," Ex. 29: 45, 46.

" God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn." I dare not meddle with them, Balaam says ; I have too much understanding of what they are, to do so; they are connected with God, with His strength and power. " Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel : according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! " According to what time ? The time when Israel was faint and weak, discouraged by reason of the length of the way, and none of their enemies on the other side of Jordan conquered. Their enemies were much mightier than they (Deut. 7 : i, etc.), and yet he says, " What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey and drink the blood of the slain." The moment he sees them under the eye of God he says that.

" And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that Jehovah speaketh, that I must do ? And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place ; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon," etc.

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So it is with us, beloved friends we are occupied with our own (ofttimes) foolish thoughts the accuser is speaking against us ; and yet nothing can prevail, because God works for us. I am not now speaking of God justifying us, but of much more ; and that is, the beauty of the order, and the never-failing source of refreshment of God's people-" all my springs are in thee." God brings this out most fully through the evil desire of Balak and Balaam.

We see in these chapters, man working according to Satan's will, and yet looking to the power and the intervention of God. Hence all is confusion : and it will ever be so. But the moment the children of God get into their right place before God, there is no confusion, no perplexity: the path is as simple as possible.

May the Holy Spirit enable us to realise as our own that peculiar feature of the church of God, and that which is the power of their holiness, and of their comfort too : " The Lord their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them."

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