

For the Journey - Blessing

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Date: 28 May 2023

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[0 : 00] Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. And Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.

So Balak, the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messages to Balaam, the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the river in the land of the people of Amor, to call him, saying, Behold, a people have come out of Egypt.

They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land.

For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed. So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with a feast for divination in their hand.

[1 : 13] And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. And he said to them, Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you as the Lord speaks to me. So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

And God came to Balaam and said, Who are these men with you? And Balaam said to God, Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth.

Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out. God said to Balaam, You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.

So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, Go to your own land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you. So the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, Balaam refuses to come with us.

Once again Balak sent princes more in number and more honourable than these. And they came to Balaam and said to him, Thus says Balak, the son of Zippor, Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, for I will surely do you great honour, and whatever you say to me, I will do.

[2 : 30] Come, curse his people for me. But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to do less or more.

So you too, please stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me. And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them, but only do what I tell you.

So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way of his adversary.

Now he was riding on the donkey and his two servants were with him. And the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field.

And Balaam struck the donkey to turn her into the road. Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards with a wall on either side.

[3 : 39] And when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again. Then the angel of the Lord went ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left.

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times? And Balaam said to the donkey, Because you have made a fool of me, I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you. And the donkey said to Balaam, Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life long to this day?

Is it my habit to treat you this way? And he said, No. Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand.

And he bowed down and fell on his face. And the angel of the Lord said to him, Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you, because your way is perverse before me.

[4 : 57] The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live.

Then Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, I have sinned, for I did not know that you stood in the road against me. Now, therefore, if it is evil in your sight, I will turn back.

And the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you.

So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak.

When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab on the border formed by the Anon, at the extremity of the border. And Balak said to Balaam, Did I not send to you to call you?

Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you? Balaam said to Balak, Behold, I have come to you. Have I now any power of my own to speak anything?

[5 : 59] The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak. Then Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-Hazoth. And Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent for Balaam and for the princes who were with him.

And in the morning, Balak took Balaam and brought him up to Bamos-Baal, and from there he saw a fraction of the people. And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together.

And Balak said to Balaam, I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee to your own place.

I said, I will certainly honor you, but the Lord has held you back from honor. And Balaam said to Balak, Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me? If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad of my own will.

What the Lord speaks, that will I speak. And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days.

[7 : 15] And he took up his discourse and said, The oracle of Balaam, the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered.

I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.

It shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed. Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed.

Israel is doing valiantly, and one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities. I wonder if you've ever thought why we call it a Christian walk.

Have you ever heard that term, how's your Christian walk going? And you end up thinking, that's not a very appropriate phrase for the Christian life. A walk kind of feels relaxed, easy.

[8 : 27] We're taking in some nice scenery on one side. We're enjoying the sun on the other. It's all very nice and peaceful. No stress. But that isn't really what the Christian life is like, is it?

When there's job loss or hardship, persecution or the dryness of the Christian life, enormous ups and downs, illness, death, bereavement, whatever the case may be.

Perhaps, I don't know, a kind of Christian rollercoaster or breakneck sprint into sleep. How's your Christian sprint going? I don't know. But it certainly doesn't feel like a walk a lot of the time.

We've just been hearing in the prayers about the persecution of Christians worldwide. There was a report released recently that over 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith last year. And perhaps when we think even as our own country, growing hostility of the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But of course, it becomes even more personal, the idea of the Christian walk, doesn't it, when we think about our own lives. Even just kind of cursorily thinking about what's happened to the church family over the last year.

[9 : 31] There's been bereavement and illness. People not coming to faith. People dying not in the faith. Job loss. Anxiety. Mocking at school. Mocking at workplaces.

Mocking at workplaces. It is just constant, isn't it? The feelings of ups and downs in the Christian life. And even if we're not experiencing kind of extreme persecution, reading the Bible and praying, well, that can feel like eating sandpaper sometimes, can't it?

And that God feels very, very distant. Or perhaps it's the fact that we've sinned again in that same way. We promised ourselves, I will never do that again. This is so wretched.

And then within a week, we're saying the exact same prayer yet again. And we can wonder and we can ask ourselves in that situation over and over, is God for me?

Is he for me? How does God feel about me right now in this moment when my faith perhaps feels so difficult? Is God for me? What does he feel about me?

[10 : 31] And this would have been a question that the people in our passage would have been asking themselves. We've had a lot of bleakness, haven't we? If we're honest, it's been, I don't know how you felt coming each morning to hear numbers preached on Sunday.

Think, oh, it's going to be intense yet again. And we've seen massive decline. We've seen Aaron and Miriam pass away. We've seen Moses sin. We've seen the people grumble again and again and again.

And it feels just so repetitive. The people are surrounded by enemies in the promised land and they seem incapable of saving themselves. And they must have been thinking, is God's patience with me going to run out?

Is he really still for me? Is God going to remain being for me? Well, this morning's talk, and it was very well read, I have to say. It was an impressively long reading with lots of names, so well done.

But this morning's talk basically has one point. Only one point. Okay, so if you're going to be kind of with me at this, please just be with me for this one part of the talk. And the one point is God is for his people all the time.

[11 : 34] God is for his people all the time. I was going to do a kind of call and answer, God is for his people, but I went far too British for that. But that is the point. God is for his people all the time.

And the way our passage is going to show us that this morning is with two case studies. God versus witch doctor. And this is on your handout, which will be a useful place for you to just be. What happens when you get set up spiritual powers against God's people?

That's case study number one. And case study number two, God versus kings. It's what happens when you set up kings and nations against God's people. And we will see without fail every single time, God is for his people all the time.

God is for his people all the time. There are a lot of verses, so we're going to go through them quite quickly. So, you know, if you need to do some stretching, if you need to do, you know, get the yawns out right now. We're going to have our noses down.

We want to see what God is actually saying to us. But we're going to be going through at pace. Okay, so I believe in us. We can do it. And that leads me to my first point. Case study one, God versus witch doctor.

[12 : 38] Have a look at 22 verses 1 to 4. Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan of Jericho. And Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

And Moab was in great dread of the people because there were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, And this horde will now lick up all that is around us as the ox licks up the grass of the field.

So Balak, the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam. So we're seeing God's promise, aren't we? Genesis 12, we think our biblical hat's on. God promised Abraham, I'm going to make a great nation of you.

That's happened. And here we see the king of Moab is quite scared by this prospect. Balak is scared. So what does Balak do? Verse 5, He sent messengers to Balaam, the son of Beor at Pithor, which is near the river in the land of the people of Amor, to call him, saying, Behold, a people has come out of Egypt.

They cover the face of the earth and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me. Since they are too mighty for me, perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them to the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed.

[13:45] Now, it's worth noting that Balaam is 400 miles away. Okay, so this isn't your normal kind of Aunt Bessie tarot card reader down the road witch doctor. This is your, well, I don't know what the equivalent would be, but this is big time witch doctor.

Okay, we're going 400 miles to find this guy. He's an impressive guy. And notice the language that Balak uses about him. It's God-like language. Verse 6, For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, he whom you curse is cursed.

It's like the author of Numbers is setting up this contrast. Who wins? Balaam, who curses and blesses, or God, who curses and blesses, who wins? Big witch doctor.

So Balaam is the premier witch doctor and off they go, 400 miles. In verse 7, you imagine walking 400 miles. I can't, it's pretty horrendous. So the elders of Mab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees of divination in their hand.

They came to Balaam, gave them Balak's message, and Balaam said to them, Lodge here tonight, and I'll bring back word to you. So have a rest. I'm going to go ask God. I'll come back and let you know.

[14:50] And this is where we get a kind of turn in the tone. As I said, Numbers has been quite intense over the past few weeks.

And here we suddenly get humour. Huge amounts of humour. It's ridiculously funny, actually, these verses when we realise what the author's doing. And we might be kind of thinking, why?

Slightly strange. God just suddenly developed a sense of humour. But it's making a very serious point. I've kind of like in Shakespeare, I've been told, this is my GCSE English coming back to me, that apparently Shakespeare's tragedies would have one scene of humour in them as a kind of like deep breath, before then back into the really serious point.

And that's what we're getting here. Humour, but making a very serious point. So they've gone on a 400 mile journey. Balaam's told them, have a little rest. I'm going to go and ask God.

And so he goes and asks God, and God says to him, verse 12, you won't go with them. You're not going to curse them. They're blessed. So Balaam got up, rose in the morning, and said to the princes of Balak, sorry guys, I know you had a 400 mile journey.

[15:57] I know you're probably tired. Computer says, no, I can't do it. Sorry. And so they turn around, 400 mile journey back. Imagine going 800 miles just to be told, no, I can't do it.

And then so they return to Balak, verse 14, and they say, Balaam refuses to come to us. So Balak, he racks his brain, and he thinks to himself, okay, no, I've got to get this guy. Okay, so sending princes didn't work.

Sending princes with money, money didn't work. What can I do? I'll send more princes with more money. So that's exactly what he does. Verse 15, once again, Balak sent princes, but more in number, and more honorable than these.

And they came to Balaam and said to him, thus says Balak, that's another 400 miles, by the way, just glossed over that. So that's 800, and then another 400, so 1,200 miles, just to chat to this guy. And he says, let nothing hinder you from coming to me, for I will surely do you great honor, and whatever you say to me, I will do.

Come, curse this people for me. But Balak answered and said to the servants of Balak, though Balak were to give me the house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to do less or more. So you two, please stay here tonight, that I may know more what the Lord will say to me.

[17:09] Now, we might think that Balak's being very pious there. He says, no, I can't, I can't do it guys, but let me just go double check. And did you notice that? He knows God has said no. He's like, just, I'll go double check.

It's kind of like when, I would imagine when children go up to their mum, and they go, mum, can I have a chocolate bar? And, and mum goes, no, no, you can't have a chocolate bar, ruin your

appetite for dinner. So the child goes, hmm, and no mum said no, what if I asked dad? Genius. So he goes up and asks dad, and says, dad, can I have a chocolate bar? And dad goes, well, what did your mum say? And, of course, and dad goes, and the child goes, she said to ask you.

And then dad goes, well, it's not very good for your health. And the child goes away and thinks, well, that's not an explicit no. And then go and raise the chocolate cupboard and smashes a whole ton of, a tub of cookies, or whatever the case may be.

And that's exactly what Balaam does. He says, well, God's already kind of said no, but I'm going to go sleep on it. And God says, verse 20, if the men have come to call you rise, go with them. I don't think that means go all the way with them, as we'll see, but do what I tell you.

[18:20] And what he's told him is, don't go. Verse 21, so Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. It's like, it's not a no, and off he goes, because he wants the money.

But of course, we see God's immediate response in verse 22. God's anger was kindled. Now, I've set this up, and we've set this up as a kind of question, God versus which doctor?

But as we now go through the rest of this, with the famous talking donkey, God then flips the question for us. So we've been thinking, God versus which doctor?

Who wins? Well, God flips the question, and says, which doctor versus an ass? Who wins? Which doctor versus a donkey? Who wins?

And as we go through these verses, just notice, who comes out looking better? The donkey? Or Balaam? Who comes out looking better? That's what we're going to see.

[19:13] Okay? And we'll get a little point scoring system for the football fans here. So, who comes out looking better? Verse 23, the journey starts, God's anger with kindled. Verse 22, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way, as his adversary now, he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him.

And the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in a robe, with a drawn sword in his hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey to turn her into the road.

Well, we've already seen, therefore, that the donkey is more spiritually discerning than Balaam.

Donkey sees the angel of the Lord, Balaam clearly doesn't, and donkey thinks, probably don't want to walk into an angel with a sword. I'm going to change direction.

Balaam has a little hissy fit, hits the donkey. One nil donkey, right? Donkey's looking better so far. One nil donkey. Let's keep going. Let's see how this develops. But the story continues.

So, verse 24, then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards with a wall on either side. And when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again.

[20:14] Then the angel of the Lord went ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

Donkey's got better survival instincts, hasn't she? Donkey's clearly got better survival instincts than Balaam. Balaam's a fool. He's being a fool. Keeps hitting the donkey. Not working. Two nil donkey. Let's keep going. 28 to 29. Verse, Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to you that you've struck me these three times? And Balaam said to the donkey, Because you made a fool of me.

I think he's made a fool of himself. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you. Pretty intense. And the donkey said to Balaam, Am I not your donkey, on which you've ridden all your life long to this day?

Is it my habit to treat you this way? And Balaam said, No. I kind of imagine this as like, It's okay. Donkey, it's okay, Balaam. I know you're having a tough time.

[21:17] I know you can't see what's going on. But I'm going to reason with you. I'm showing you my emotional intelligence. You don't need to be hitting me like, Have I ever treated you like this before? You can imagine Balaam.

No. You see, it's the classic one-word answer. No. I guess not. In other words, the donkey is more emotionally intelligent than Balaam, is what we're seeing at this point in time. Three-nil donkey.

So it's a pretty resounding conclusion, isn't it? Three-nil donkey. The donkey is wiser. He's got more spiritual insights. The donkey can talk, which Balaam just seems to skip over. By the way, the donkey's talking.

Okay. Because he's just so angry about not being able to go in the right direction. And the donkey's more emotionally intelligent. Calms Balaam right down. Very nice. Very lovely. Three-nil donkey. And despite all of this, the Lord is utterly in control.

Did we see that in the reading? Verse 35. The angel of the Lord said to Balaam, Go with the men, but speak only the words that I tell you. So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak. And so in our kind of first point, just to pause, and we've been asking ourselves, haven't we, is God for his people?

[22 : 21] Well, when it comes to God versus witch doctor, God flips the question and says, a witch doctor, when it comes to me, and when it comes to cursing my people, is dumber than an ass.

I am for my people all the time. He will not curse you. Look at this ridiculous little man when compared to the one true God. I am for you all the time.

And we come to our second and final case study, God versus king. And this is right through to chapter 24, God versus king. Now, I want us to imagine now, to really get, to really imagine that we're there.

Okay, we are now, you are now Alan or Alice, the altar architect. Okay, that's who you are. You're now Alan or Alice, the altar architect. Okay, you're very good at building altars.

It's in your name. You're an altar architect. Okay, so you build the altars that people sacrifice things on. That's who you are. Okay. And we start out, and you're part of one of kind of Balak's key team.

[23 : 22] So Balak is the one that sets you to kind of the king, to build altars, take them down, build altars, take them down. Verse 41 of chapter 22, in the morning, Balak took Balaam and brought him up to Bamoth Baal on top of a hill.

And from there, he saw a fraction of the people. And chapter 23, verse 20, chapter 23, verse 1, Balaam said to Balak, build for me here seven altars and prepare for me seven bulls and seven rams.

So you can imagine Alan thinking, I've got to build an old seven altars. Why am I building seven? I'm going to build seven altars. Goes up to the top of the hill. I wonder if you ever tried to take seven bulls up a hill.

I haven't, but I would imagine that that's incredibly difficult to try and take seven bulls up a hill. And then you build your seven altars. Probably has to be quite a big altar to put a bull on an altar. I would imagine. It's not a small altar.

It's probably a very big altar. And then you have to kill the bull and sacrifice the bull. It's all very, you know, very time consuming, pretty exhausting. And then Balaam, verse 3 of chapter 23, said to Balak, stand beside your burnt offering and I will go.

[24 : 22] Perhaps the Lord will come meet me and whatever he shows me, I will tell you. And you think, well, this has got to work, hasn't it? Seven altars. Seven's the perfect number. Everyone knows that. It's got to work.

Seven bulls. It's not that there's any pigeons we're sacrificing. We're sacrificing seven bulls. You can't get better than this. Of course this is going to work. Alan's feeling pretty confident. And what happens when Balaam comes back, verse 7, chapter 7, our bulls are burnt, verse 7, Balaam took up this discourse and said, Verse 8, And you can imagine Alan thinking, Oh, for goodness sake, I've just built seven altars for you to curse these people, only a fraction of the people, and you can't do it.

And we see Balak's frustration, verse 11, And Balak said to Balaam, What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you've done nothing but bless them. And Balaam said, and he answered and said, Must I not take care to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?

You can imagine Balak there frustrated. He's brought this guy 400 miles. It's not worked. And he gathers his team. He brings in Alan and Alice and the altar makers into his team.

And you can imagine Alan there thinking, Well, what are you going to do now, Balak? And Balak's like, Oh. Okay, so seven altars. Yeah, that's right. Seven bulls. Yep. And we were on top of the hill.

[25 : 53] We were on top of the hill. And we only had to see a fraction of the people. Only a fraction. And it didn't work. It didn't work. Hmm. What can I do to up that?

I'll do it again on a different hill. Genius, he thinks. Genius. I'll do it again. And Alan and Alice are there like, You're going to make me do it again. So then Alan has to trek back down the hill. He has to go to Billy, the bull buyer, or whatever the case, and go, Billy, I know I bought seven bulls off you this morning. I need another seven bulls. And Billy, you need 14. Yeah, I need 14 bulls, Billy. Okay?

And he thought, Don't ask. It's been a terrible day. And then they get the bulls. And then they go back up, verse 13. And Balak said to him, Please come with me to another place from which you may see them. You shall only see a fraction of them and shall not see them all.

Then curse me from there. And he took him to a field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. And then Balak said to Balak, Stand here beside you for an offering while I meet the Lord over there.

[26 : 53] And Alan at this stage, Alan, the altar architect, is thinking, Please, this is God, don't make me do this again. That's 14 bulls I've now taken to the top of hills. 14 altars I've now built.

This is getting ridiculous, Balak. I'm not doing it again. And then Balaam comes up, verse 18. He's ready. And Alan's got, you know, fingers crossed, Please, can you just get this curse over and done with so I can go home?

And Balak, what does he say? Verse 18. Rise, Balak, and hear. Give ear to me, O son of Zippor. God is not a man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it?

Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? Behold, I received a command to bless. He is blessed, and I cannot revoke it. He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob, nor has he seen trouble in Israel. Their Lord, their God is with them, and the shout of the king is among them. And the frustration, you imagine, Balak and Alan, what are you doing, Balak? Shut up. We asked you to curse, and you are just blessing left, right, and center.

[27 : 54] I've built 14 altars, and you're still cursing. And that's what we see in verse 25. Balak said to Balak, do not curse them at all, and do not bless at all. But Balak answered, Balak, did I not tell you? All that the Lord says I must do.

So Balak puts his head together again with his altar building team. He thinks, okay, so seven altars didn't work. Didn't work. Seven bulls didn't work. No, that didn't work either. And that hill didn't work. No, no, no, that hill didn't work. That hill didn't work. No, you're right, it didn't. That hill will work. Third time's the charm.

Let's do this. And so verse 27, and Balak said to Balak, come now, I'll take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there. So Balak took Balak to the top of Peor, which overlooks the desert.

And Balak said to Balak, build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me seven bulls and seven rams. And Alan at this point, live it. Can you imagine? Three times, you only contracted me to do this once.

[28 : 54] So he goes back down to Billy, the bull buyer, and says, Billy, you're not going to believe this. I need another seven bulls. And Billy's like, you want 21 bulls in one? Yeah, I want 21 bulls.

So he takes the bulls back up to the top of the hill, burns them, and thinking, Balaam, if you do not curse these, I don't know what I'm going to do. So Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord, chapter 24, verse 1, to bless Israel.

He did not go as at other times to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up this discourse.

It's the oracle of Balaam, the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eyes opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered. How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel.

Verse 8, God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of a wild ox. He shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces, and pierce them through with his arrows.

[29 : 55] He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness who will rouse him up. Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you. And verse 10, Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together.

And Balak said to Balaam, I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you've blessed them three times. And Balak's patience has finally run out. Verse 11, he says, flee back to your own place.

So Alan's relieved. Alan, the altar architect, no more altars. Thank goodness, this can all be finished. This can all end. I can go home. And then Balaam interrupts and says, verse 12, did I not tell you messengers whom you sent me?

If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the Lord to do either good or bad of my own will. What the Lord speaks, that I will speak. And now behold, I am going to my people, but before I go, come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days.

And he took up this discourse and said, the oracle of Balaam, the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eyes opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered.

[31 : 04] I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. It shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down the sons of Sheth.

Balaam is so prone to blessing God's people because of God that even when Balak doesn't ask him, even when Balak is like, can you just, okay, don't curse, just stop talking, Balaam says, I'm sorry, I've got to keep blessing.

So even when there's no altars anymore, Balaam speaks an amazing prophecy, an amazing blessing, again and again and again. Balaam can't stop blessing.

And as we kind of think about, therefore, and he goes on to continue his blessing and eventually he goes home, the final verse, verse 25, rose back and went to his place and Balak also went his way. But the point is an unmistakable one, isn't it? That God is for his people all the time. God is for his people all the time. It doesn't matter if the witch doctor is set up against them.

[32 : 07] It doesn't matter if a foreign king is set up against them. It doesn't matter what religious practices they do, altars upon altars, bulls upon bulls, hills upon hills, fraction of the people there, fraction of the people here.

God is for his people all the time. All the time. And so when Balaam sets himself up to curse, when Balak sets himself up to conquer God's people, God says, I'm blessed.

I'm blessed. I wonder if you've ever been to one of those games arcades with the claw. The claw. Only 90s kids will get that reference. Toy Story? No?

Okay. And basically the claw, it comes down, doesn't it? And it's rigged. Okay? Sorry to break it to you, it's rigged. Because the claw never closes enough to actually go around the bear's head and pull it out.

So you think, this is perfect, I've got it. It comes down and then, you know, it might come up a little bit and then, you know, agonizingly falls out and you live it. It's because it's rigged. Well, that's exactly like the case here.

[33 : 05] Balaam doesn't realize and Balak doesn't, it's rigged. You can't curse God's people. In the same way, the claw won't close further than you want it to. You can't curse the people of God.

God said, God said, I'm for my people all the time. I'm for my people all the time. Sorry, it's rigged. You're dumber than a donkey. So it doesn't matter what the people in the wilderness have done and it doesn't matter who's opposed to them.

God is for his people all the time. Now for us, as we close, there's also an enormous and wonderful irony here. If we return to 24 verse 17, this verse, I see him, but not now.

I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. It shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.

And that is a verse that has come up before in Genesis 49 and it's going to come up again all throughout the Bible. And because it's talking, it's a prediction that the Lord Jesus Christ then owns about himself.

[34 : 11] So the enormous irony of this is that the great witch doctor of this age and the one who's paid money to curse God's people ends up giving one of the key prophecies about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know the beautiful irony of that? And that this is a nation and a people that thinks they're setting themselves up against God's people and God takes it and makes a prediction about his son

Jesus.

And God is so for his people. He is so utterly in control that he even uses Balaam to make a prediction about his son. And of course, as we return to that question, many of us, whatever the case may be, whether it's that dryness in our spiritual life, whether it's loved ones who walk away from the Lord Jesus Christ, whether it's job anxiety, whatever the case may be, where we find ourselves asking, which we all will, is God for me?

Is he actually for me? Or when we fall into that sin just yet again, or when someone mocks us at school and it seems like there's no other Christian friends there or in the workplace, and we can find ourselves asking, is God for me?

Well, the answer from Numbers and the answer from Jesus is God is for his people all the time.

God is for his people all the time. And of course, for us as New Testament Christians, as we look at the cross, as we see the lengths that God would go to to show us that he's for us, that he would go far enough to give his only son, well, of course we know God is for us all the time.

[35 : 44] Why don't I lead us in a final prayer? Dear Lord, we thank you for these precious words. We thank you that you, when you have set yourself to bless your people, will always do so.

Thank you that we, and those of us who have put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, can have utter confidence that you will be for us always because we are your people. Amen.