

# 'God's Determination to Bless'

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Date: 24 May 2026

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] And let me begin by just saying that in life we are often determined to do all sorts of different things, aren't we? Whether it's achieve certain marks at uni or some things at work or complete some studies, or like this kid who's determined to win his race or this kid who's determined not to be messed with or even determined to score a goal in soccer like this guy.

Yes, that is me, seriously determined. Those were the glory days. Actually, what am I saying? I never scored a goal in my life. I ended up just wrecking my knees and having reconstructions. But anyway, I guess that's the difference though between us and God, isn't it? We can be determined to do something but not be able to do it. But it's not so with God.

If he is determined to do something, he will do it. And today we'll see that he's determined to bless his people. But this week really is a continuation of last week.

And so for those who weren't here, let me give a recap and even remind those who were here. Last week we saw that Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam, the seer, to curse Israel.

[ 1 : 1 8 ] A seer is someone who sees the spiritual realm by way of divination. Think modern day seance, that kind of thing. A bit like a witch doctor that is still around in Africa.

And Balaam was happy to either bless for bucks or curse for coins. It didn't worry him as long as he got paid. Because as we saw, he loved money.

And so Balak, the king, hired Balaam, the seer, to curse Israel for him. But God actually told Balaam from the start that he's not to curse them because God has already blessed them.

And we saw that way back in Genesis where God promised Abraham the blessings like the land, the land of Canaan, that he will show them that where Abraham was actually living at the time.

And he will make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. And he will bless Abraham by being his God and Abraham his people. In fact, he will even bless those whom Abraham blesses and curse those who curse him.

[ 2 : 2 2 ] And God had already started to do this. God had already started to keep those promises for they were already a great nation. And yet despite being told that he could not curse them back in chapter 22 last week, he still went hoping he could get away with it and get paid for it.

I mean, it looked like he was obeying God, but looks can be deceiving, right? And so knowing his heart, God ends up rebuking him with a talking donkey.

Remember, not that donkey, the Eddie Murphy one from Shrek, the different one from chapter 22, and rebukes him for trying to curse Israel when he was told not to.

And so the summary of last week is really the one that the Bible gives in the New Testament. Peter is talking about false teachers who have left the way and wanted to follow the way of Balaam, son of Beor, the guy that we're looking at, who loved the wages of wickedness.

But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey, an animal without speech, who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness at trying to go against God to still curse Israel for money.

[ 3 : 3 8 ] Well, this week we see Balaam the seer has now come to Balak the king, but Balaam hasn't told the king that he cannot curse him. He's only told the king he must say what God tells him.

And so what follows are seven messages that God inspires Balaam to speak. But it spans two chapters, which is way too much for us to cover in detail.

And so I'll summarize, I'll need to summarize, and we'll probably skip point two altogether. But it starts with Balaam's three blessings. So point one and the end of chapter 22, verse 41.

And so here we read that Balak, and that's the next morning, and the king takes Balaam up to a mountain so that he could see the outskirts of the Israelite camp, perhaps so he can see the ones

he's supposed to curse.

And despite what God has already told him, Balaam goes along with the plan. It seems he's still hoping to twist God's arm and curse God's people for money, especially since in verse 1 of chapter 23, Balaam tells the king to build seven altars and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for sacrifices.

[ 4 : 54 ] And the number seven seems to be the number for gods, just like in the book of Revelation in the Bible, it's the number for our God as well. And they both take part in it.

It says, And I think what's happening here is Balaam trying to curry God's favour.

Because in verse 3, he tells the king to stay with the sacrifices, and he'll go to an isolated spot to talk with God by way of divination or seance.

And then when God, verse 4, Why would you point out what you've done for God when God already knows?

Unless you're hoping it will twist God's arm to do something for you. And that's what it seems to be here. Other so-called gods don't really care about their people.

[ 5 : 59 ] And so in the past, it seems he's been able to bring cursing on other people. But our God is different. His arm can't be twisted. He can't be brought off with sacrifice from humans, at least.

And he does care about his people. And so in verse 5, God completely ignores what Balaam said and simply put a word in Balaam's mouth and sent him back to speak it.

And so that's what happens. He goes back to the king and the other officials there. Have you ever had a moment of inspiration? You know, you kind of, a really good idea pops into your head or a really profound piece of advice comes out of your mouth and then afterwards you think, Oh, actually, that was pretty good.

Surprising myself. Sometimes you do it with maybe a new recipe or something and it turns out really good. Anyway, that seems to be what happens here. Because although Balaam is hoping to curse for coins, he's momentarily inspired to bless by God.

So as soon as he sees the king and the officials, he starts in verse 7 with his message about how the king brought him to curse Jacob, which is another name for Israel.

[ 7 : 17 ] But then he says in verse 8, How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced?

He cannot curse Israel because God has decided not to. Rather, God has decided to bless instead, you see. And so that's what Balaam does by praising Israel for their greatness as a nation.

So in verse 9, he talks about seeing them from on top of the mountain peaks. And in verse 10, he talks about their greatness firstly in terms of number. Who can count the dust of Jacob? Or even number a quarter of Israel.

There's so many of them. They're great in number. And also great in righteousness, it seems, because he goes on to say, Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my final end be like theirs.

Balaam blesses them by praising them and declaring Israel is indeed a great nation. So great in number, you can't count them.

[ 8 : 24 ] And so great in righteousness, at least compared to other nations, that he desires to die like them. Of course, he later betrays Israel and is judged.

So it's not an ongoing desire he has here. It's a bit like some people that I've met over the years where they hear about Jesus and want to become a Christian because it, you know, sounds good, but they don't stick with it.

It's like they're inspired for a moment, but it's sadly not permanent. So also Balaam here. He's inspired for a moment, but it's not permanent.

Well, despite what he was hoping to do, Balaam momentarily blesses Israel by praising their greatness in terms of numbers and righteousness, for God is determined to bless his people.

And we know it's a blessing because Balak says so in verse 11. He says, What have you done to me? I brought you here to curse them. But you've done nothing but bless them. Back before businesses used websites to advertise, they used to use a book called The Yellow Pages.

[ 9 : 35 ] Am I the only one that remembers this? Anyway. And the most famous ad for The Yellow Pages was this one. Jan?

Jan? Jan? Where's our ad in the Yellow Pages directory? Keep calm. Count to ten. One, two, three, eight, nine, ten.

Not happy Jan! And that did become a meme on the web, actually.

But here, it's not happy Jan. It's not happy Balaam. The king brought him to curse these people and he's blessed them. Of course, like most people today, Balaam claims to be innocent.

He says in verse 12, Must I not speak what the Lord puts in my mouth? It's not my fault. I'm innocent. But Balaam is a slippery seer. What he says is technically true, but it's not the whole truth.

[10:41] Balaam never told the king that God has said from the very start, last week, beginning of chapter 22, that you cannot curse Israel. It's not going to work. Because they're already blessed.

But instead, he went along with the king and even gave the sacrifices, hoping to change God's mind and get paid. He even lets Balak try again, verse 13.

So Balak said to him, Come with me to another place where you can see them. You won't see the whole camp, but just the outskirts of the camp. And from there, you can bless them for me. Balak thinks a change of location with a different angle on the people might help Balaam curse them.

And it kind of reminds me of the movies where a sniper changes location to get a better shot of the people. It's that kind of thing here. Yet it seems Balaam knows better.

For this time, he doesn't tell the king to build the altars. The king just does it all by himself and sacrifices by himself. Either way, in verse 15, the king stays with the sacrifices and Balaam goes to meet with the Lord by way of divination or seance again.

[11:55] But again, we're told, the Lord met with Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, Go back to Balak and give him this word, which he does. And so verse 17, he goes back and then in verse 18, he tells them to listen and hear.

And if you're a parent, you're used to saying that to your kids, right? Listen, hear. And then he goes on to say, God is not a human that he should lie. Not a human being that he should change his mind.

Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise those promises of blessing to Abraham and then not fulfill them? Of course not. And so Balaam has no choice.

He must bless Israel. Here again, you see, is God's determination to bless his people. Even if he has to use a slippery seer like Balaam to do it.

And so in verse 21, he blesses them by saying, no, misfortune is seen in Jacob. No misery will come upon them from other nations. Next week, we'll see them sin spectacularly and misfortune will come upon them because it's their own doing, but it won't come upon them from other nations.

[13:05] This is part of the blessing. And then he goes on to say that the Lord their God is with them and so they can shout in victory because their king is among them, he says.

And then he goes on to talk about those victories and the strength that God gives them. He says, just as God brought them out of Egypt, giving them a strength like an ox, which Egypt could not stop, so Israel will continue to be strengthened and gain victory.

Verse 23, no divination, no omen can stop them. Indeed, people will look at them and say, see what God has done for them.

Put differently in verse 24, they will rise like a lioness or a lion and towards the end it gets a bit graphic, a bit M-rated, but the idea is they will win. In other words, Balaam blesses them with victory because God is with them to strengthen them.

Now, can you imagine the king at this point? You hired this witch doctor, this seer, to curse these people so that you could defeat them and instead he blesses them and makes them undefeatable.

[14:21] It would be like your kids or friends or nieces or nephews or grandkids or whatever asking you to come and watch your game so that, you know, they could cheer and bless you but then when you go there, you actually cheer and bless the opposition.

I mean, how would the kids feel, right? That's how the king's feeling here and so he says in verse 25, neither curse them at all nor bless them at all.

My mum used to tell me growing up, if you can't say anything nice then don't say anything at all. Well, Balak is saying if you can't say any curse then don't say anything at all.

Stop talking. But this slippery seer again says it's not my fault. Did I not tell you must do whatever the Lord says?

He's saying he's innocent. In fact, he's even saying more than he's innocent. He's blaming Balak. He says, I told you so. It's not his fault even though he didn't tell the king what God told him right at the start.

[15:25] Have you ever heard the expression, another expression, three times a charm or one more time for the dummies? The king seems to be operating by these kind of philosophies because he does try one more time, a third time.

Only this time he says in verse 27 instead of giving Balaam a better view of the people he hopes he will give God a better place to make him happy. Perhaps this place will please God to let you curse them for me.

But Balaam knows it won't work. He knows God wants to bless. Yet this slippery seer goes along with it perhaps so he won't be blamed for it when it doesn't work.

And so in verse 29 he tells the king to build the altars again though he doesn't participate in the sacrifices like the first time. Balak does so. And then we're told in chapter 4 verse 1 when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel he did not resort to divination as the first two times but he just turned his face towards the wilderness where Israel were camped.

You see Balaam knows it's not going to work to curse them because he knows God wants to be pleased to bless them. So he doesn't even bother using divination to speak with God he just looks over Israel and waits for a word to bless.

[16:47] And he doesn't have to wait long because in verse 2 the Spirit of God comes upon him and this time causes him to fall to his knees and see a vision which he then speaks as a prophecy.

It's kind of like Pentecost Sunday actually where God's Spirit came upon his apostles enabling them to speak his word or even momentarily it comes upon a false prophet to speak his word.

And so he does in verse 5 saying how beautiful Jacob or Israel two names mean the same nation again how beautiful they are and how numerous they are they're spread out like a valley.

And then he adds in verse 7 water will flow from their buckets their seed their descendants will have abundant water. In the ancient world water was a symbol for life and so this blessing is really saying that they will have abundant life and their king will be greater than Agag which was a well-known king a bad king but well-known back at the time and their kingdom will be exalted he says.

They will even continue to have strength like an ox and defeat hostile nations. They'll be so powerful like a lion or a lioness verse 9 who lies down you just don't want to go near them you don't want to rouse them.

[18:16] And like God said to Abraham those they bless will be blessed but those who curse them will be cursed. Now all of that is quite a blessing isn't it? Quite a pronouncement.

And so no wonder that was the straw that broke the camel or rather the king's back. For in verse 10 Balak's anger burned against Balaam. He struck his hands together kind of like a boxer you know I've had enough of this guy and tells him to go home get lost in verse 11.

And of course Balaam again protests and says did I not tell you in fact he says I told you so even more did I not tell even the messengers you sent me that this is what I'd have to do it's not my fault I told you so.

Well in verse 14 Balaam is about to leave but before he does it seems God's spirit comes upon him again to issue four warnings about the defeat of Israel's enemies by a distant king but we don't have time to look at them and so we're going to skip point two and go to point three God's one lesson for us and I think the lesson is reasonably clear and that is God is determined to bless his people that's the one big lesson we see it through the whole account really we see it for example in the first blessing where Balaam said how can I curse those whom God has not cursed how can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced because he's determined to bless instead you see or the second blessing where he said God is not human that he should lie not a human being that he should change his mind no no he's promised blessing to Abraham way back at the beginning and he's not going to lie or change his mind no he's going to fulfill his promise in other words

God is determined to bless his people even by the way we're told twice the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth which is a word of blessing because God is determined to bless or the third time the way that God's spirit came upon him because God is determined to bless even the fact that Balaam blesses Israel not once not twice but three times it all shows God's determination to bless his people and unlike me trying to score a goal in soccer God can make it happen for no opposing king like Balak no slippery seer like Balaam can stop him no in all these things God works for Israel's good to bless them for God is determined to bless his people and it's the same for us that God is so determined to bless us he even gave up his one and only son Jesus to die for us now how determined to bless must you have to be to give up what's most precious to you to die for your enemy but that's what

[ 21 : 17 ] God did and what blessings then does he give us through Jesus well the Bible tells us every spiritual blessing in Christ ones like forgiveness such that we can start enjoying life with God now we can call him our father in heaven and we have ongoing forgiveness because we still sin don't we or is that just me maybe I don't know forgiveness I know we talk about it a lot but it really is a great blessing as is adopting us into his family or a great nation like Balaam's first blessing for Christianity is great in number it's still the largest religion in the world and it's great in righteousness not our own righteousness by the way but the righteousness Jesus gives us that we can clothe ourselves with it's like having sin underneath and then we get the jacket of his righteousness to put over the top so that when God looks at us that's what he sees not our sin but Christ's righteousness we even show the right way to live in life like loving one another these are all blessings that others don't have as well as the gift of God's spirit such that God is always with us to strengthen us perhaps like an ox like Balaam's second and third blessings as Paul writes in Philippians

I can do all this through him who gives me strength that's a blessing too God even gives us some physical blessings as well like the things we enjoy in life and as Christians like one another where we can encourage and help each other I continue to see throughout our church community people caring for one another whether it's sending messages of encouragement through difficult times or giving lifts to people who can't drive or providing meals for those in need that's a blessing of course it's great having every spiritual blessing and some physical ones but we really want every physical blessing too don't we like a perfect health perfect body a rich and comfortable life the kind of abundant water or life that Balaam mentioned in his third blessing you know the wealth health and happiness that everyone wants and plus as Christians we want the blessing of our king Jesus and his kingdom being recognized or exalted by our world as great rather than being persecuted by our world as many Christians are today or ridiculed as we might be today but here's the thing God may give us some of those physical blessings now but like Israel they'll only all come later God does not guarantee them all the physical blessings now but he does guarantee them for later that's why God was bringing them into their true land at the land he had waiting for them to enjoy all the blessings he promised them that's why he's bringing us to our true home the world to come he has waiting for us to enjoy all the blessings he's promised us like it says in revelation and then I saw a new heaven and a new earth the world to come for the first had passed away and in this new world to come there'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain no no the old order of things the bad things we experience in this world will be gone it will be only abundant life with every physical blessing and the spiritual ones we already have of course like Israel before we get there we face battles in life don't we for Israel it was enemies our armies for us it's temptation and suffering and yet for all

God's people hearing that God is determined to bless us or to encourage us to keep trusting that he will keep trusting that he will firstly bring us through those battles and ultimately to the home he has waiting for us with every blessing he's promised us and trusting that in the meantime that he will work for our good in all things even hard things to bless us by making us more like Jesus that was our second reading we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and that good is especially to be conformed to the image of his son and he will also work to bring us home for he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also along with Christ graciously give us all things that is all things that we need to bring us home to the world God says for those who love him verse 28 who love God by believing in Jesus after all how can you love God if you refuse to believe in the son of God you can't can you and so do you do you believe in Jesus and for us who do then do you realize how determined God is to bless you such that you really can keep trusting him to do so we can trust that he'll bring us through our battles of temptation and suffering to our true home the world he has waiting for us with every physical blessing he's promised us and we can trust that in the meantime that he'll keep working for our good to bless us by making us more like Jesus in all things even the hard things even when we cannot see it at the time there's an old hymn which if

[ 27 : 41 ] I thought about it more we would have had but we're not but this old hymn says when through the deep waters he calls you to go the rivers rivers of trouble shall not overflow the Lord will be with you to help and to bless and work for your good through your deepest distress let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for your determination to bless us so much so you gave your only son Jesus to die for us that we might have every spiritual blessing in him right now we thank you that you also give us many physical blessings in this life and that you have promised

every one of them in the life to come and so help us to remember your determination to bless us so that we can keep trusting you in life even when we face hard things like battles and suffering to trust that you're still working for our good to not only bring us home but make