

He Fights For Us Numbers 22-24

We've come out of a very heavy week with the assassination of Charlie Kirk on Wednesday and remembering 9/11 on Thursday, and these come right on the heels of the tragic school shooting in Minneapolis that took place just two weeks ago. These evil events are very sobering and remind us that we have an enemy at work around us – an adversary who is seeking to kill and destroy in any way possible.

The Bible tells us that Satan rebelled against God long ago and was cast to the earth with the other rebellious angels, called “demons.” These evil spiritual beings are opposed to God and opposed to humans who were created in God's image and for his glory. So ever since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Satan has been seeking to destroy mankind, especially the people of God.

His tactics are many and the wake of his destruction is very wide and visible. Ephesians 2:2 reminds us that Satan is at work in the sons of disobedience, influencing the course of this world. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that he prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Ephesians 6:12 says that we are in a battle against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

When you recognize this and see the demonic evil happening around us it can feel like the world is a very dangerous place to be, especially for Christians. It can make us afraid for our children and grandchildren and our very own lives. It can make us want to hold up in our homes and go into hiding so that we can try to protect ourselves. It can make us afraid to speak the truth and let our light shine for Christ in the community for fear that we or our loved ones might become the target of Satan's next attack.

The world feels like a spiritual minefield with dangerous and deadly footfalls in front of us that we can't see. It feels like you or your loved ones could take the wrong step and become the next victim of the evil around us.

All of this produces fear, and that's exactly what Satan wants. If he can control us with fear, it's a victory for him. If he can keep us in our homes and inside our churches focused on protecting ourselves and not bearing witness for Christ and the gospel and not letting our light shine in the world, he wins. The light gets dimmer and the darkness goes unhindered.

How do we keep that from happening? How do we overcome the fear and live with courage and confidence? I want us to see something today – a story in the book of Numbers that reflects the struggle we're going through with Satan and shows us why we need not fear but can live with courage and boldness. This is a famous story that was told and retold throughout Israel's history to give them courage and boldness in the face of whatever danger they faced. It's a story that reminded them of who God was and what he was doing, even when they weren't aware and couldn't see.

I was thinking about reading the whole story, but I timed it, and it took 15 minutes to read, so I decided to just read parts of it and summarize the rest. I encourage you to read it on your own. I want you to see what God does for Israel in this story because I believe that God does the same thing for us today in the war against Satan.

This story is found in Numbers 22-24 and takes place when the Israelites were camped in the plains of Moab, just east of the Promised Land while making their final preparations to go in and start the conquest.

Read Numbers 22:1-6.

Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. ² And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³ And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. ⁴ 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, ⁵ sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, 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. ⁶ 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 enemy of Israel in this story is Balak, the evil king of Moab, which was located to the east of the Dead Sea (Map). The Israelites had already destroyed two of his neighboring kingdoms and he was terrified of them. So he met with the kings of Midian, who were also in that area. They were Baal worshippers and very wicked, and they came up with a plan. They sent messengers to a powerful seer named Balaam who lived far to the north to have him come and pronounce a spiritual curse over Israel to weaken them so they could drive them out of their land. Balaam was a pagan prophet and sorcerer who summoned the spirits, and whose services could be bought for a price.

When the messengers arrived at Balaam's house, he told them he would speak to Yahweh, the God of Israel, to see what he would say. He was familiar with Yahweh from his interactions in the spirit world, and it's evident that he feared him and would not go against his will. God spoke to him and told him: "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." So the messengers returned to Balak and told him the news, but he turned around and sent even more messengers back to Balaam who were of higher stature than the first. This time God told Balaam he could go, but under one circumstance: he could only do what God told him to do. So Balaam saddled up his donkey and went.

Along the way there was a humorous interaction that happened between an angel of the Lord, Balaam's donkey, and Balaam himself. The angel stood in Balaam's way 3 times and would not allow him to pass, but only the donkey could see him and not Balaam. So when the donkey refused to go forward, Balaam got infuriated and beat her, and then the donkey actually spoke to Balaam and asked, "Why are you beating me?" At that point, the Lord opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel who was there to warn him – he could keep going to Balak, but he must only speak the words that God gave him.

So you can see how things were setting up. Balak is anticipating Balaam's arrival and eager to have this powerful seer pronounce a curse over Israel so he can go in and destroy them. Balaam is reluctantly coming to meet him,

bound by his fear of the God of Israel, and resolved to say only what Yahweh tells him to say.

So the two meet up and after some explanation of why he didn't come the first time he was summoned, Balaam made it very clear to Balak that he would not speak anything of his own accord, but only the words that God put in his mouth. For some reason, Balak was fine with that, and still thinking his plan to curse the people of Israel would work, so he took Balaam to an overlook where he could see part of the camp of Israel to pronounce his first curse. Balaam told him, "I will go. Perhaps Yahweh will come to meet me, and whatever he shows me I will tell you."

Well, Yahweh did meet him and gave him a word to speak to Balak...

Numbers 23:7-12

And Balaam took up his discourse and said,

*"From Aram Balak has brought me,
the king of Moab from the eastern mountains:*

*'Come, curse Jacob for me,
and come, denounce Israel!'*

⁸*How can I curse whom God has not cursed?*

How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced?

⁹*For from the top of the crags I see him,
from the hills I behold him;*

*behold, a people dwelling alone,
and not counting itself among the nations!*

¹⁰*Who can count the dust of Jacob
or number the fourth part of Israel?*

*Let me die the death of the upright,
and let my end be like his!"*

¹¹*And Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have done nothing but bless them."* ¹²*And he answered and said, "Must I not take care to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?"*

So his first attempt to curse Israel did not go well, but in his fear and hatred for Israel he decided to try again, this time from a different overlook. Balaam went out again and the Lord gave him another word for Balak...

Numbers 22:18-26.

And Balaam took up his discourse and said,

“Rise, Balak, and hear;

give ear to me, O son of Zippor:

¹⁹ *God is not 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?

²⁰ *Behold, I received a command to bless:*

he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it.

²¹ *He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob,*

nor has he seen trouble in Israel.

The Lord their God is with them,

and the shout of a king is among them.

²² *God brings them out of Egypt*

and is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

²³ *For there is no enchantment against Jacob,*

no divination against Israel;

now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,

‘What has God wrought!’

²⁴ *Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up*

and as a lion it lifts itself;

it does not lie down until it has devoured the prey

and drunk the blood of the slain.”

²⁵ *And Balak said to Balaam, “Do not curse them at all, and do not bless them at all.”*²⁶ *But Balaam answered Balak, “Did I not tell you, ‘All that*

the Lord says, that I must do’?”

So for the second time, the evil plans that Balak had to pronounce a curse over Israel failed miserably and Balaam pronounced a blessing instead. The exact opposite of what Balak wanted to do was actually happening. And again, for some reason, Balak decided to try again from a third overlook,

hoping that this time there would be a curse. And you already know what happens...

Numbers 24:2-14.

And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him,³ 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,
⁴the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered:*

*⁵How lovely are your tents, O Jacob,
your encampments, O Israel!*

*⁶Like palm groves that stretch afar,
like gardens beside a river,
like aloes that the Lord has planted,
like cedar trees beside the waters.*

*⁷Water shall flow from his buckets,
and his seed shall be in many waters;
his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.*

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

*⁹He 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.”*

¹⁰And 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. ¹¹Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, ‘I will certainly honor you,’ but the Lord has held you back from honor.” ¹²And Balaam said to Balak, “Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, ¹³‘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'?

Finally, Balak had enough and sent Balaam home. But before leaving, God had a final crushing word he wanted Balaam to speak to Balak. I won't read it, but it foretold of a king who would rise out of Israel to crush Moab and destroy the surrounding kingdoms.

I love this story because of what it shows us about our God. Our God is a protector and defender of his covenant people. The Israelites had no idea this was even happening. No idea of what their enemy was trying to do, and it didn't matter because God was fully aware and fighting the battle for them. All Balak's attempts to bring a spiritual curse upon them failed because God protected them and fought for them. He even took the attempted attack and turned it into a blessing instead.

It's because of God's protection over Israel that the Psalmist wrote this wonderful song in Psalm 121:

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

² My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

⁸ The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."

This is who God was for the covenant people of Israel, and that is who God is for us today. We don't have some of the same covenant promises of physical protection that God gave to the Israelites, but we do have the same God who promises to be with us and that he will give us everything we need to stand firm in the faith to the end. Philippians 4:19 says, *"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* And we have promises of protection against Satan and the spiritual forces of evil. In Luke 10:19 Jesus told his disciples: *"Behold, I have given you authority to*

tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.”

God is our protector and defender in the battle against evil that we face every day. Evil is all around us and can be very frightening. Satan’s forces are at work and we can see that. But we are not in this battle alone as if it depends on our strength and ability to protect ourselves. God is fighting for us! God is working behind the scenes in the spiritual realm in ways we aren’t even aware of to frustrate the plans of Satan and his attempts to destroy us. And God will see us through. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 it says, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.”*

Nothing happens beyond God’s sovereign control. And even when he allows bad things to happen like have happened in recent days – things that Satan uses to try to destroy us and turn us away from God – God can turn them upside down and use them for something good. It doesn’t remove the pain, but the pain won’t ruin us. Romans 8:35-39 declares this:

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is because of our powerful and good God and because of his promises of keeping and protecting us that we do not have to live in fear. If God is for us, who can be against us? We can live bold and courageous lives as we hold forth the word of truth and let our light shine for the glory of Christ. And we can be assured that the victory is ours.