

If you don't believe them in the first place then they don't have to have any effect on you at all!

 Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest.

Proverbs 26:2

What does this mean?

According to this oracle can God be controlled?

Balaam is telling Balak that his whole theology is wrong.

3 The Third Oracle - Read Numbers 24:3-9

This is the first of Balaam's oracles to be described as a prophecy.

What is the basic message of the prophecy?

 "How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel!

"Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters. Water will flow from their buckets; their seed will have abundant water. Numbers 24:5-7

What does this mean?

 The place where they are camped is semi-desert which makes the imagery quite profound.

Can you flourish in a wilderness?

Again there is the mention of a king. What do you make of this?

May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!" Numbers 24:9

 **Where have you heard this before?**

Is it still true of us?

What implications does it have?

4 The Forth Oracle - Read Numbers 24:15-19

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth. Numbers 24:17

What do you think Balaam sees?

 This is often considered to be a messianic prophecy. The star and sceptre are Jesus. Much of the embedded poetry in the first five books of the bible is Messianic.

You might notice the oracles move from physical to spiritual; population – Covenant-Peace and prosperity – Messiah.

 There is no indication that Israel even knows that Balaam is on these mountains trying to curse them. We assume they know something is going on as they can see the smoke from the sacrifices.

Are we always aware when God is protecting us?

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Balaam and Balak

 **Read Numbers 22:36-41**

What happens?

How would you describe the relationship between Balak and Balaam?

The relationship is strained from the beginning.

 **Read Numbers 23:1-6**

Balaam goes on to bless Israel instead of cursing them.

We will look at what he says later.

As noted in the previous study, seven sacrifices probably implies exorcism – Balak is trying to exorcise God from the Israelites.

 **Read Numbers 23:11-15**

How does Balak respond?

What action does he take?

Obviously, Balak is not happy. The solution is to move to a new location. In Number 27 after again the cursing fails, they move location.

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." Numbers 23:27

In the Ancient Near East version of paganism, there is a give and take relationship with the gods. Humans gave the gods what they needed and the gods gave the humans what they needed. The idea was to use this to control the gods. There is a tri-factor here; the right words; the right sacrifice and the right place. Balaam is the right person with the right words. The sacrifices are right, so Balak assumes the location is wrong. It is going to be a mountain or "high place" the question is which mountain? Balak tries three. None of them work. It never dawns on him that his theology is wrong.

 **How does this approach to the gods compare with ours?**

We do what God tells us to.
For us, faith is a relationship.
Based on love, not control.
Not out to get the most we can.
We want to honour and worship God

Do we sometimes try to control or manipulate God?

It is clear we have a totally different understanding of how religion works.



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Balak gets increasingly upset with Balaam.



Read Numbers 23:27-28

Read Numbers 24:10-13

How does Balak respond to Balaam's "curse"?

To his credit, Balaam only does say what God tells him despite the mounting pressure on him to do what Balak wants. There is a little bit of a parallel going on here; Balaam's relationship with the donkey is mirrored with Balak's relationship with Balaam. Neither can understand what the other party sees, why they are behaving the way they are and why they won't do what they are told. The donkey is trapped between the angel and Balaam, Balaam is trapped between God and Balak. Balaam and Balak seem to talk past each other.

Balaam annoys first God and then Balak. He is good at ticking people off.



Do you think this was easy for him to resist Balak's pressure?

How easy is it for us to give in to the pressure of people around us rather than doing what is right before God?

What is going to help you resist this pressure?

In contrast to Balak Balaam grows in confidence.



Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to divination as at other times but turned his face toward the wilderness. When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came on him Numbers 24:1-2

The prophecies that Balaam gives are quite insightful and are worth looking at.



The First Oracle - Read Numbers 23:7-10

How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? Numbers 23:8

What does this mean?

I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations. Numbers 23:9 cf 1 Peter 2:9



How was this true of Israel?

How is it true for us?

What implications does it have for us?

Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my final end be like theirs!" Numbers 23:10



What does he mean by this?

What is the death of the righteous going to be like?

In God's time and with a good future after death.

Does this imply he wants to join Israel?

Spoiler alert: There is an irony here as Balaam does not achieve this aspirational goal and dies the death of the wicked.



The Second Oracle - Read Numbers 23: 18-24

Pisgat includes Mt Nebo and may be the same mountain that Moses climbed to see the land before he died.

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 and not fulfil? Numbers 23:19



What does it mean "God is not human?"

Obviously, God is not human, God is God. What it means is that God is not like humans.

In context, in what way is God not like a human?

God cannot be controlled God is not fickle.



How does God not changing His mind help us?

If God promises something can you rely on it? 2 Corinthians 1:20

God is reliable and constant.



"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. Numbers 23:21

Do you notice a problem with this verse?

Balaam obviously had not read the rest of the book of Numbers. Reading the book, there is quite a lot of misfortune and misery in Israel.



So what does the verse mean?

What does it mean for us?



Balaam sees Israel as she really is. This is a prophetic statement and an ideal. Ultimately whatever happens to us God is in control and will bring it about for our good. Face with misfortune and misery, we need not fear and we can have confidence. Most of the misery in Numbers was self-inflicted and could have been avoided. The enemy does not have free reign in our lives and we face nothing that we cannot overcome or endure. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Even in adversity, we are protected.



What does 'the shout of the king is among them' mean? - especially as Israel does not have a king for the next 4 books.

How is the shout of the king among us and what does it mean?

There is no divination against Jacob, no evil omens against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'See what God has done!' Numbers 23:23

What does this mean? cf Isaiah 54:17



Many people live in fear of curse and occult influences; should we?

Does that mean we should take such things lightly?



Sometimes it is the things that are not in the bible that are significant. The nations around Israel were obsessed with the dangers of curses. If they experienced misfortune they always considered a curse placed upon them as a possible cause. This could create mistrust and instability in society as people looked for the person who placed the curse. Books like Leviticus are very keen to divorce misfortune from curses. The Bible contains no instruction on breaking curses. This is in stark contrast to the literature of the region.

Why might this be?

The bible does link our wrong behaviour towards God with a curse.

How might this work?

Despite all that has been said above, is it still possible of a Christian to live under a curse?



Alarmingly yes. This is one of those areas where the truth really does set us free John 8:32. If we allow ourselves to live under it we will. If we acknowledge that Jesus has set us free from every curse and there is no divination against us we will live in freedom.

Words spoken over our lives often form curses, these are mostly the "you are...." words spoken by people who have standing in our lives.

How do you get free from these?